

**2019 - 2020**  
**Ventura County Grand Jury**



**Final Report**

**Human Trafficking in  
Ventura County  
April 8, 2020**

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# **Human Trafficking in Ventura County**

## **Summary**

Human trafficking is not just a national or state problem, it is a problem in Ventura County (County).

Also known as modern-day slavery, human trafficking is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labor or sex. It is often misidentified as other crimes such as prostitution, child abuse, domestic violence, unsafe working conditions or human smuggling. The crime victim is frequently misidentified as the crime perpetrator.

An investigation was initiated by the 2019-2020 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) to determine if the County has a coordinated policy to address the issue of human trafficking, including adequate funding, staffing, training and the appropriate services available for victims.

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO) formed the Ventura County Human Trafficking Task Force (Task Force) in January 2020 to coordinate the efforts of governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations in the County to combat human trafficking. As part of the Task Force, Interface Children & Family Services (Interface) agreed to provide victim services, training and community outreach. The Grand Jury concluded that the formation of the Task Force is a significant step forward in combatting both sex trafficking and labor trafficking in the County and commends each of the members of the Task Force for undertaking this concerted effort.

The Grand Jury found that some massage parlors in the County operate as illicit sex businesses. The Grand Jury recommends the County and each of the cities within the County coordinate their respective ordinances regarding massage parlors through the efforts of the Task Force and designate at least one employee, from an appropriate County agency, to coordinate the investigation and enforcement of the ordinances regarding massage parlors.

The Grand Jury found that both the Task Force and California State University Channel Islands Center for Community Engagement would benefit from a partnership through which the Task Force is helped with certain administrative matters and the University students are able to participate in service learning projects.

A significant number of indigenous Oaxacan people, the majority being Mixtecs from Southern Mexico, live and work primarily as agricultural laborers in the County. Many speak only their native language, Mixteco, and find it difficult to communicate with law enforcement and victim support services. The Grand Jury

recommends the Task Force’s community outreach efforts include culturally appropriate methods to engage that community.

Many victims of human sex trafficking in the County are from China and Taiwan. Individuals from China read “simplified Chinese,” while individuals from Taiwan read “traditional Chinese.” These two forms of written Chinese use different characters. The Grand Jury recommends the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office (VCDA) provide human trafficking posters in simplified Chinese as well as traditional Chinese.

## **Background**

Human trafficking is a complex organized criminal activity. It is often misidentified as other crimes, such as prostitution, child abuse, domestic violence, unsafe working conditions and human smuggling. (Ref-01)

An investigation was initiated by the Grand Jury to determine if the County has a coordinated policy to address the issue of human trafficking, including adequate funding, staffing, training and available services for the victims.

According to the California Attorney General, “Human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons or modern-day slavery, is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labor or services, or to engage in commercial sex acts. The coercion can be subtle or overt, physical or psychological, and may involve the use of violence, threats, lies or debt bondage. Exploitation of a minor for commercial sex is human trafficking, regardless of whether any form of force, fraud or coercion was used. Human trafficking does not require travel or transportation of the victim across local, state or international borders.” (Ref-02)

Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. Severe forms of trafficking include sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion or in which the person induced to perform the act is under 18 years of age. (Ref-03)

“Labor trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, or transportation of a person for labor services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion... Labor trafficking arises in many situations, including domestic servitude, restaurant work, janitorial work, factory work, migrant agricultural work, and construction.” (Ref-02)

“There is no single profile of a trafficking victim. Victims of human trafficking include not only men and women lured into forced labor by the promise of a better life in the United States, but also boys and girls who were born and raised here in California. Trafficking victims come from diverse backgrounds..., but one characteristic that they usually share is some form of vulnerability. Trafficking

victims are often isolated from their families and social networks and, in some cases, are separated from their country of origin, native language and culture. Many domestic victims of sex trafficking are runaway or homeless youth and/or come from backgrounds of sexual and physical abuse, incest, poverty or addiction. Traffickers exploit these vulnerabilities, promising the victims love, a good job or a more stable life.” (Ref-02)

"Some of the barriers to identifying victims include a lack of public awareness about trafficking, a lack of awareness and training among law enforcement and other professionals who may have direct contact with victims, difficulty in distinguishing between smuggling and trafficking, and insufficient resources to investigate potential trafficking cases.” (Ref-04)

California Penal Code Section 13519.14 requires all law enforcement officers to receive training in the identification and handling of human trafficking. (Ref-05) California SB 970 requires hotels to provide awareness training to employees who are likely to come in contact with victims of human trafficking. (Ref-06) Currently firefighters and emergency medical technicians are not required to receive training regarding human trafficking. (Ref-07) Interface has raised awareness in the community by training hotel staff, bus drivers and medical service providers to recognize the signs of human trafficking and methods to report appropriately. (Ref-08)

***Prior Efforts to Combat and Address Human Trafficking in the County.***

The passage of the California Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2005 made human trafficking a felony in California. (Ref-09)

For the past five years, Ventura County Children & Family Services (VCCFS) has received California grant funds of \$500,000 per year for the Respectfully Empowering and Defining Yourself (READY) program, which provides services to child victims of human trafficking. (Ref-10)

California SB 1193, enacted in 2012, requires posters with human trafficking hotline numbers to be displayed in several categories of public places and businesses. (Ref-11)

Inclusion of nonprofit organizations in the human trafficking strategy has been an effective way of providing services to the victims. The Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking (VCCAHT) was formed in 2015 as the first formal response to human trafficking in the County. (Ref-01)

VCSO has been actively pursuing human trafficking crimes by assigning resources from the Organized Crimes Unit. Investigations in Thousand Oaks in 2016 resulted in five arrests and contacts with 18 adult victims. An investigation in Camarillo in 2018 resulted in one arrest and contacts with five victims,

including two adults and three minors. All those arrested were prosecuted. (Ref-12)

The County established a Memorandum of Understanding in April 2019 with seven County agencies to address commercially sexually exploited children. (Ref-13)

Since 2007, Soroptomists International of Oxnard has organized an annual rally event “STOP Human Trafficking and Sexual Slavery” to bring attention to the issue. In 2019, the County pledged \$2,500 for the 2020 event. Also in 2019, Soroptomists International of Oxnard launched a public awareness campaign consisting of five billboards, five bus shelter ads and a 30-second video shown in five local movie houses. In January every year, the restaurant chain In-N-Out Burger holds a public awareness campaign to raise funds to help victims of human trafficking.

Since 2016, Interface has helped 80 human trafficking survivors by providing programs and in-person emergency response for adult victims of human trafficking. (Ref-14) Forever Found, an international nonprofit organization, supports the needs of the County in the rescue of minor victims, assisting survivors and supporting them in their recovery. (Ref-15)

Dignity Health, a health care provider which operates medical facilities in the County, has a human trafficking response and training program (updated October 2019) to ensure that trafficked persons are identified and assisted in health care settings. (Ref-16)

## **Methodology**

The Grand Jury reviewed the following documents:

- County of Ventura, Application for Federal Assistance SF-424, dated June 10, 2019
- Interface Children & Family Services, Ventura County Human Trafficking Task Force – Victim Services Application to the Bureau of Justice Assistance of the United States Department of Justice (BJA)

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with representatives of the following entities and reviewed their respective websites:

- The City of Ventura Community Development Department
- 4Kids2Kids, Inc.
- Family to Family
- Forever Found
- Interface
- Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP)

- Santa Paula Latino Town Hall
- Santa Paula Police Department
- Soroptomists International of Oxnard
- Ventura County Board of Supervisors
- VCCFS
- Ventura County Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Program
- VCDA
- Ventura County Family Justice Center
- Ventura County Farmworkers Resources Program
- Ventura County Fire Department
- Ventura County Office of Education
- VCSO
- The cities of Oxnard, Camarillo, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks and Ventura

The Grand Jury also reviewed the websites of:

- California Department of Justice, Attorney General
- United States Department of Justice
- United States Attorney’s Office, Central District of California
- National Human Trafficking Hotline
- VCCAHT
- The Polaris Project

In October 2017, the California Legislature enacted AB 1227, the Human Trafficking Prevention Education and Training Act (AB 1227), that required the sex education curriculum for middle and high school students include education regarding human trafficking prevention. AB 1227 was effective for the 2019-2020 school year. The Grand Jury concluded a review of the implementation of the requirements of AB 1227 was outside the scope of this report and, accordingly, this report does not address the implementation of AB 1227.

**Facts**

**FA-01.** In 1990, the federal government indicted a farmer in Somis for extortion and slavery of more than 300 farmworkers from Mexico. This was reported as the first identified case of human trafficking in the County. (Ref-17)

- FA-02.** In 2018, California accounted for 1,656 (15%) of the human trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, significantly more than any other state. (Ref-18)
- FA-03.** The US 101 corridor between Los Angeles and San Francisco through the County is both a transit route for trafficking and a destination due to its large population, proximity to Mexico, significant immigrant population and easy access to transportation. (Ref-17)
- FA-04.** According to the VCSO, victims are bought and sold in motels and hotels lining the US 101 corridor through advertising on the internet. (Ref-17)
- FA-05.** VCCAHT has documented cases of both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Victims have been male and female, adults and children, citizens and undocumented people of many ethnicities. (Ref-01)
- FA-06.** A survey conducted by VCCAHT of nine government and nonprofit organizations and agencies identified 57 human trafficking victims from January 2014 to April 2016 in the County. (Ref-01)
- FA-07.** In January 2016, the City of Ventura Police Department conducted a “demand” operation by posting a fictitious online ad offering sex for sale. The ad received over 100 responses in just under eight hours. People responding to the ad were told the person for sale was a minor. Officers made four arrests. (Ref-19)
- FA-08.** In April 2016, a “demand” operation conducted by the Oxnard Police Department received responses from 109 potential purchasers, resulting in 14 arrests. (Ref-19)
- FA-09.** Between January 26, 2020 and February 1, 2020, over 70 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and community organizations participated in “Operation Reclaim and Rebuild,” a crackdown on sex trafficking. This statewide operation resulted in 76 adult and 11 minor victims being recovered, 266 males arrested for the charge of solicitation and 27 suspected traffickers arrested. (Ref-20)
- FA-10.** In January 2020, VCSO, Interface and Forever Found participated in “Operation Reclaim and Rebuild” that resulted in four victims contacted and two other individuals arrested in the County. (Ref-12)
- FA-11.** Many victims of human trafficking do not self-identify as victims. (Ref-17)

**FA-12.** Victims, particularly international victims, frequently refuse to cooperate due to their common distrust of people they perceive to be in powerful positions and/or retaliation from their trafficker. (Ref-04, Ref-17)

**FA-13.** Human trafficking is significantly underreported. (Ref-21)

**FA-14.** The number of human trafficking victims receiving assistance in the County during the identified years was as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>
2014-2015	6
2016	10
2017	21
2018	24
<u>2019</u>	<u>12</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

(Ref-17)

**FA-15.** Of these 73 human trafficking victims receiving assistance between 2014 and 2019, 69 were adults and four were youths; 47 were sex trafficking victims, five were labor trafficking victims and 21 were victims of sex/labor trafficking. (Ref-17)

**FA-16.** The VCSO and VCDA state that enforcement of human trafficking laws and ordinances is complicated and expensive. (Ref-12, Ref-22)

**FA-17.** In 2019, the County, through VCSO, applied for and received an \$800,000 grant over three years from BJA to form the Task Force. (Ref-17, Ref-23)

**FA-18.** The members of the Task Force include:

**Local Law Enforcement:** All police departments in the County, VCSO, the Ventura County Probation Department and the California Highway Patrol

**Federal Law Enforcement:** Federal Bureau of Investigation and Homeland Security Investigations

**Prosecution:** VCDA, the California Attorney General and the United States Attorney’s Office

**Human Trafficking Victim Service Providers:** Interface, VCCFS, Forever Found and VCCAHT

**Regulatory Agencies:** Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner and the United States Department of Labor

**Other Key Partners:** Assembly member Jacqui Irwin, MICOP and the Polaris Project (Ref-24)

**FA-19.** In its efforts to coordinate governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations in the County, the Task Force states it will take the following actions:

***Law Enforcement and Prosecution***

- Develop protocols for the investigation, arrest and prosecution of human traffickers and purchasers
- In the second and third years of the grant, conduct short- and long-term investigations and other covert procedures using and refining protocols

***Victim Services***

- Develop victim-centered and trauma-informed protocols for human trafficking victims
- Develop screening and victim service referrals and facilitate the use of victim service protocols
- Create a plan for conducting proactive victim-centered investigations of labor and sex trafficking in collaboration with law enforcement

***Professional Training and Community Outreach***

- Develop a plan for professional training regarding human trafficking and protocols for raising public awareness and community outreach
- Develop training videos and conduct training for investigators, patrol officers and those most likely to interact with human trafficking victims

***Data Collection***

- Develop protocols for data collection and analysis as well as data sharing and confidentiality

***Sustainability***

- Develop a plan to assess the Task Force’s performance
- Develop a plan to address sustaining the Task Force’s operations, investigations and victim services after federal funding ends (Ref-24)

- FA-20.** In coordination with the Task Force, Interface applied for and received a \$900,000 grant over three years from BJA to provide victim services to the Task Force and provide training and community outreach across the County. (Ref-25)
- FA-21.** In conjunction with the Task Force, Interface states it will provide the following victim services, directly or indirectly:
- Case management
  - Child care
  - Client intake, client orientation and life skills
  - Housing, clothing, food and basic necessities
  - Crisis intervention and 24-hour response
  - Assistance in obtaining or replacing necessary documents
  - Education, family support and reunification
  - Interpreter and translator services
  - Legal, medical, dental and mental health care services
  - System-based victim advocacy (Ref-26)
- FA-22.** Some massage parlors operate as illicit sex businesses. (Ref-27)
- FA-23.** Ordinances regarding massage parlors differ among the County and the cities within the County. (Ref-17)
- FA-24.** The Task Force is currently developing a model ordinance that is intended to help curb illicit massage parlors and proposes to have that or a similar ordinance adopted by the County and all the cities within the County. (Ref-12)
- FA-25.** California State University Channel Islands established the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) providing service-learning projects for students. These projects provide partnerships with nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies in the County, and may include translation, outreach activities, event organizing, advocacy, research and report writing, data analysis and computer work. (Ref-28)
- FA-26.** Twenty thousand indigenous Oaxacan people, the majority being Mixtecs from Southern Mexico, work primarily as agricultural laborers in the County. The Mixtec community is culturally and linguistically isolated. Many speak only their native Mixteco, which is not a written language. (Ref-29)

- FA-27.** In the interviews with advocates for indigenous farm laborers in the County, all emphasized the need for more trilingual (Mixteco, Spanish and English) “trusted messengers” as part of the efforts to combat human trafficking in the County. (Ref-30)
- FA-28.** Many victims of sex trafficking in the County are from China and Taiwan. (Ref-27)
- FA-29.** Individuals from China read “simplified Chinese,” while individuals from Taiwan read “traditional Chinese.” These two forms of written Chinese use different characters. (Ref-31)
- FA-30.** California SB 1193 requires posters with human trafficking hotline numbers to be displayed in several categories of public places and businesses. (Ref-11)
- FA-31.** VCDA has human trafficking posters in English, Spanish and traditional Chinese available for download from its website. (Ref-32)
- FA-32.** The State of California Department of Justice, Attorney General’s Office, has human trafficking posters in simplified and traditional Chinese available for download from its website. (Ref-33)

## **Conclusions**

- C-01.** The Grand Jury concluded that both human trafficking in sex and labor exists in the County. (FA-01, FA-02, FA-03, FA-04, FA-05, FA-06, FA-07, FA-08, FA-09, FA-10, FA-11, FA-12, FA-13, FA-14, FA-15, FA-16)
- C-02.** The Grand Jury concluded that the formation of the Task Force is a significant step forward in combatting both sex and labor human trafficking in the County. (FA-17, FA-18, FA-19, FA-20, FA-21)
- C-03.** The Grand Jury concluded that differences in County and city massage parlor ordinances allow illicit businesses to avoid legal consequence. (FA-22, FA-23)
- C-04.** The Grand Jury concluded that coordinating ordinances regarding massage parlors among the County and the cities within the County will improve the effectiveness of enforcement operations. (FA-23, FA-24)
- C-05.** The Grand Jury concluded that dedicating at least one person to coordinate the enforcement of massage parlor ordinances will improve the effectiveness of enforcement operations. (FA-23, FA-24)

- C-06.** The Grand Jury concluded that the Task Force can expand its resources for accomplishing its stated goals by partnering on projects with the CCE. (FA-25)
- C-07.** The Grand Jury concluded that farm laborers who only speak Mixteco find it difficult to communicate with police and service providers. (FA-26, FA-27)
- C-08.** The Grand Jury concluded that most of the victims of sex trafficking from China cannot read the posters regarding human trafficking written in traditional Chinese posted in the County. (FA-28, FA-29, FA-30, FA-31)
- C-09.** The Grand Jury concluded that posters in simplified Chinese regarding human trafficking are available. (FA-32)

## **Recommendations**

- R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends the County and each of the cities within the County coordinate their respective ordinances regarding massage parlors through the efforts of the Task Force. (C-03, C-04)
- R-02.** The Grand Jury recommends the Environmental Health Division of the Ventura County Resource Management Agency or other appropriate County agency designate at least one employee to coordinate the investigation(s) and enforcement of the ordinances regarding massage parlors. (C-05)
- R-03.** The Grand Jury recommends the Task Force contact CCE to determine if there is a partnership arrangement that will benefit the efforts of the Task Force. (C-06)
- R-04.** The Grand Jury recommends, as part of the Task Force’s community outreach efforts, it include culturally appropriate outreach methods, including radio broadcasts, attendance at community meetings, cultural festivals and health fairs, as well as audio/visual media and illustrated pamphlets to reach the indigenous population in the County. (C-07)
- R-05.** The Grand Jury recommends VCDA make available human trafficking posters in simplified Chinese as well as traditional Chinese. (C-08, C-09)

## **Responses**

### Responses Required From:

City Council, City of Camarillo (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Fillmore (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Moorpark (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Ojai (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Oxnard (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Port Hueneme (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Santa Paula (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Simi Valley (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Thousand Oaks (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
City Council, City of Ventura (C-03, C-04) (R-01)  
Ventura County Board of Supervisors (C-03, C-04) (R-01)

### Responses Requested From:

Environmental Health Division of the Ventura County Resource Management Agency (C-05) (R-02)  
Ventura County Human Trafficking Task Force (C-06, C-07) (R-03, R-04)  
Ventura County District Attorney (C-08, C-09) (R-05)

## **Commendations**

The Grand Jury commends each of the members of the Task Force for undertaking a concerted effort to combat human trafficking in the County. (C-01, C-02)

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- Ref-08.** Grand Jury interview of representatives of Interface on September 26, 2019
- Ref-09.** California Trafficking Victims Protection Act, 2005, Section 6  
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- Ref-26.** Interface Children & Family Services Ventura County Human Trafficking Task Force – Victim Services Application to BJA, Appendix B, Mandatory Services

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## **Glossary**

<b><u>TERM</u></b>	<b><u>DEFINITION</u></b>
BJA	Bureau of Justice Assistance of the United States Department of Justice
CCE	California State University Channel Islands Center for Community Engagement
County	Ventura County
Grand Jury	2019-2020 Ventura County Grand Jury
Interface	Interface Children & Family Services
MICOP	Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project
Task Force	Ventura County Human Trafficking Task Force
Trusted Messenger	People from the community who are considered safe and credible by the people they are engaging
VCCAHT	Ventura County Coalition Against Human Trafficking
VCCFS	Ventura County Children & Family Services
VCDA	Ventura County District Attorney
VCSO	Ventura County Sheriff’s Office