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Human Trafficking Awareness Month: DCF and DOJ continue efforts to combat human trafficking

(MADISON) – The month of January has been designated as Human Trafficking Awareness Month in an effort to bring awareness to this important issue impacting communities. Through coordinated efforts, the State has continued to make children and youth a priority in the fight against human trafficking.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Department of Justice (DOJ) have been strong partners in their commitment to combatting the growing crisis of human trafficking in Wisconsin, and continue to work on providing a comprehensive response that supports trafficking survivors and dismantles trafficking networks.

From June 1, 2017 through August 31, 2018, child welfare workers confirmed 99 incidents of children and youth sex trafficking throughout the state. Because not all sex trafficking cases are reported to the child welfare system, it is likely that this underestimates the actual number of sex trafficking incidents perpetrated against Wisconsin children.

“Human trafficking is affecting children in our biggest cities and our smallest towns,” said Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary-designee Emilie Amundson. “Yet, many in our communities don’t even know a problem exists. We look forward to continuing our efforts to protect children at-risk and provide needed services to survivors.”

Since 2016, DCF has undertaken efforts to create awareness, education, prevention, and service initiatives to address the issue of child sex trafficking across Wisconsin, including a nationally recognized prevention and awareness campaign called [WI, We Need to Talk](#). The campaign aims at

informing citizens about youth sex trafficking by helping them recognize the warning signs and how to report suspected trafficking.

DOJ has made significant strides in dismantling trafficking networks and training communities and law enforcement. In 2018, DOJ trained approximately 5,000 people on how to recognize and report human trafficking, including casino and hotel staff, bus and truck drivers, and mall security.

“The Wisconsin Department of Justice is committed to fighting human trafficking by working with local law enforcement to dismantle trafficking networks and by supplying policymakers with better information,” said Attorney General Josh Kaul. “Wisconsinites can help by alerting law enforcement to suspicious activity.”

The DOJ Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) Human Trafficking Bureau also provides specialized training and operational assistance to law enforcement to identify, target and prosecute traffickers statewide. Since the bureau was created, 79 human trafficking investigations have been initiated, and 17 child and 59 adult victims of trafficking have been recovered in Wisconsin. The bureau also works with all levels of law enforcement to promote victim centered approaches for investigations and conducts demand suppression operations to target customers and deter sex buyers who create the demand that fuels the crime of human trafficking.

This month, DOJ launched new data collection tools, through the DOJ Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis, to enhance the understanding of incidents of human trafficking reported to local law enforcement in Wisconsin. This data will provide a snapshot of the criminal justice response to human trafficking in Wisconsin.

DCF and DOJ encourage individuals to help get the conversation started in their community by hanging posters and spreading the message on social media through free resources available on the [WI, We Need to Talk website](#) and the [Department of Justice website](#).

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