



One Step Ahead: Anticipating and Responding to New Threats to Student Health and Safety

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Good morning and welcome all to the Office of Safe & Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) National Conference. I'd like to thank Secretary Duncan for including the issue of human trafficking on the agenda for your discussion of safe schools and communities. Human trafficking, also known as "modern slavery," is an important issue to address because it threatens the safety of our children and our communities, but sadly this is less of an emerging issue than it is a recognition of an age-old evil. I welcome this opportunity today to engage with all of you because you are essentially "first responders" on this issue. You are on the front lines. It is often you who notice the signs of abuse, or whom children reach out to initially.

But first, what exactly is human trafficking and why is someone from the State Department, which typically looks beyond U.S. borders, presenting at the Department of Education's conference? Human trafficking is a contemporary form of slavery, where individuals are induced through force, fraud, or coercion into situations of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation. Children induced into performing a commercial sex act are also considered trafficking victims even where overt force, fraud, or coercion is not used.

Slavery, in its various manifestations, continues to be a global problem. This year—137 years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued—the United States' annual Trafficking in Persons Report discusses the problem of modern-day slavery in 175 countries.

As educators, you may have taught your students that the United States outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1808. You probably taught them about the Thirteenth Amendment and its promise of freedom, or about civil rights pioneers, such as Sojourner Truth or Frederick Douglass. Sadly, the responsibility of the U.S. to enforce the prohibition against compelled service is not relegated to the history books.

It also is not limited to faraway foreign countries. Cases of human trafficking have been reported in all 50 states; Washington, DC; and some U.S. territories, impacting foreign and U.S. victims alike. As President Obama has said, "There are thousands who are trapped in various forms of enslavement, here in our country.... It is a debasement of our common humanity." Today, we find men, women, and children enslaved in the sex industry, agricultural work, factories, and private homes.

The human face of trafficking is "Willia," who was brought from Haiti to Miami at age 14 and was forced to work 15 hours a day, 7 days a week, cooking, cleaning, and doing household chores in a Florida home. When she was lucky enough to get to go to school, she tried to conceal her injuries from teachers. Hungry for a way out, she responded to an advertisement for a modeling school that promised to help boost self-esteem and confidence. Over several weeks, she confided in the operator, and eventually took her advice to run for help.

The human face of trafficking is "Michelle," an American teenager forced to work in strip clubs and engage in prostitution in bars in New York and Connecticut; a girl whose every movement was monitored and a girl who was beaten when she did not earn enough money for the thugs who acted as if they owned her. The men who held her in servitude did so not just by beatings and threats, but also by the promise of glamour and love.

As a former federal prosecutor, I have seen the real harm, violence, and trauma perpetrated on the victims, and the greed and cruelty of the traffickers. I have witnessed children exploited and preyed upon. But even more, I have seen the strength of survivors. Children not only can bounce back from trauma with a vigor that can be astounding, but they can and will respond to adults who take the time to care about them.

As President Obama's Ambassador-at-Large to Combat Human Trafficking, I am responsible for leading our anti-slavery efforts at home and abroad. Secretary Clinton and I also chair interagency coordination groups that include the Department of Education, and we are constantly seeking the best policies to ensure that no person is held in involuntary servitude in America, especially children. We recently participated in the *World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents*, which brought over 3,500 people together from 170 countries to engage on these issues.

We are speaking out: the recently released trafficking report highlights the situation of children held in bondage not just in prostitution but as servants, on farms or fishing boats, and even mining for gold. And the Department is drafting the U.S. report on the implementation of the UN's Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Pornography, and Child Prostitution, which will relay to the global community initiatives to protect children around the United States.

Because for all of the attention that people may pay to the problem of human trafficking overseas, many disturbing human trafficking trends are happening right here at home. Sadly, many of them involve the horrific practice of child prostitution. Technology is used as a trafficking tool, with internet fora used not just to exchange apartments or furniture, but to make prostitution assignments. Rather than being a place for fun and friendship, social networking sites are sometimes used as blackmail threats, through the prospect of posting nude photos online or exposing someone's activities to the friends or family from whom they ran away. Offenders use chat rooms, message boards, and specialized Web sites to obtain information about where pliable or vulnerable young victims can be found, or to share child pornography.

Legal structures need constant reevaluation as we learn more about child exploitation in its myriad forms. The law needs to be flexible in places. For instance, we should not have to fear that child pornography charges will be brought against a teacher or principal who tries to investigate cases of "sexting" among their students.

But there are some areas in which flexibility is the wrong approach. There is a need for both a legal and a cultural message that does not tolerate prostitution. I was surprised to learn that in Rhode Island—in a misguided attempt to be compassionate to people in prostitution—prostitution is legal so long as it happens indoors, and girls as young as 16 years of age can legally dance in strip clubs. Just pause for a moment and imagine the conversation between a teacher and that tired sophomore or junior who is falling asleep in home room because she was working late as a stripper. It is a legitimate concern that such a hands-off approach toward the so-called "sex industry" can result in a zone of impunity in which police can't go, and where traffickers can exploit their prey. State legislators are trying to close these prostitution loopholes in Rhode Island, so that the state does not become a magnet for commercial sexual exploitation.

These issues of law or technology aside, what we see in these cases are children who are trapped by the very people they trusted. We see how the most vulnerable girls are targeted for prostitution, particularly those considered "throw-away" or run-away youth from dysfunctional families. At a time when children too often aspire to a sexuality far beyond their years and are exposed to a culture that is more likely to romanticize pimps than expose their cruelty

and lies, victims want to believe the promises of love and protection.

But once a girl takes the bait, we see a loss of identity, dehumanization, violence, and even indicia of ownership such as tattooing. The very adults who could help are rejected, in favor of the man who abuses and exploits her.

But no matter how difficult, it is incumbent on us though to see that girl not as a hard-bitten street child, or as a delinquent. Rather, we must see her as a girl who belongs with her friends, with her peers. It is essential to look beneath the surface, beyond the superficial or the semantic. A cultural shift must accompany law enforcement efforts – we have to understand these children as victims who need our help regardless of how they may act out. Changing culture, changing mindsets, and changing perceptions will require all of us. Change is possible.

Each one of us has the power to affect that change. In this room alone, we have teachers, principals, school nurses, security guards, and school superintendants. Each of us has a distinctive role to play. We can all be “first responders.” Guards may notice and phone in the recruiters lurking on the perimeter of school grounds, waiting to entice girls with lies of glamour and excitement. Health practitioners and educators may notice signs of sexual abuse, depression, or fear. Principals may notice odd patterns of school attendance or registry of children by non-custodial adults.

The good news is that there are resources and tools available. The Department of Education has produced a fact sheet for schools entitled: *Human Trafficking of Children in the United States*. This fact sheet includes information on how to identify a victim of human trafficking and how to report a suspected incidence of human trafficking. The U.S. Government also funds the National Human Trafficking Resource Center and its national hotline (1-888-3737-888). And as you heard, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has both a hotline (1-800-THE-LOST) and a CyberTipline.

In addition, the U.S. Government has a report compiling all the various U.S. government activities and initiatives to combat human trafficking. My office has a website with multiple fact sheets, links, and resources, including our signature global Trafficking in Persons Report.

Tomorrow morning, as part of the conference, there will be an Institute on Child Sex Trafficking and Cybercrime with an “A-list” of experts. This workshop will allow more detailed analysis and discussion of these issues, and I would highly recommend attending this Institute. This workshop will also allow the organizers and presenters to hear from you about what you are witnessing in your home environments. We look to you as experts in the education community. You know best how to reach and educate young people on this topic. What an amazing focus group we have here.

So, I’ll leave you with some homework questions, so that you can think about some of these issues in the next days. How can we change culture so that we can ensure that men and boys do not think of prostitution as acceptable, and so girls are wise to the false promises of those who would harm them? How can we use technology to halt human trafficking? What partnerships must be forged to affect change?

America has been a leader on the human trafficking issue and foreign governments will continue to press us for progressive answers and innovative solutions. Most importantly, trafficking victims and survivors are counting on us not to fail them.

When I was a prosecutor, a girl told me that she had felt so scared and alone when she was being turned out to the “clients.” With all of us, and those who we will touch, young people need to know that they are not alone: that we will not turn a blind eye to their abuse. Thank you.