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## CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS

### TALKING POINTS

## MULTI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING



SEPTEMBER 13, 2017

- Thank you for that introduction and good afternoon to you all.
  - It is an honor to be here today to discuss the highly important topic of Multi-Sector Partnerships to Combat Human Trafficking.
  - This meeting reaffirms the United States' responsibility and commitment to ending human trafficking, forced labor and the most fundamental violation of human rights.
  - Preventing human trafficking and forced labor should continue to be at the forefront of conversation, protecting innocent individuals from being lured into a life that no human deserves.
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- With the United States being the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, it is absolute travesty that every year nearly 17,500 individuals are trafficked into the country.

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- Traffickers make nearly \$150 billion annually, with 20.9 million people worldwide victimized by human trafficking.
  - It is estimated that \$142 billion worth of products imported into the United States were brought by victims of human trafficking.
  - Since Hurricane Harvey, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner launched an initiative to combat a potential spike in human trafficking throughout the recovering city.
  - In Houston alone from December 2007 to June 15, there were 717 confirmed cases of human trafficking.
  - Human trafficking and forced labor is not just an issue on a global scale; it is taking place every day in our country.
  - Thank you for inviting me to discuss this and other important global development issues with you.
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# Human Trafficking Even Bigger Concern In Houston After Hurricane Harvey

An increase in online sex ads is just one of the warnings issued by the city trying to thwart the crime.

HOUSTON, TX — While cleanup and recovery efforts continue in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, the city of Houston reemphasized Tuesday a short-term response to human trafficking will be carried out. Though the city launched an initiative earlier this year to combat human trafficking on a year-round basis, and it stated Houston could rise to be a shining example of how to fight it, having evacuees stranded on cots all over town after Harvey shed a new light on its possibility on a short-term basis.

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The short-term response includes educating not only victims, but it also serves to alert the general public about a potential rise in trafficking when family members may be displaced. This includes an executive order from the mayor's office to ensure Houston engages in safe labor contracting practices, an increase in online sex ads, collecting labor statistics for Houston and creating a forum to share this information with the relevant consular offices so they can share with its citizens.

The city's anti-trafficking team patrolled the shelters to educate residents on a "nexus between natural disasters and human trafficking," according to a release sent Tuesday afternoon. The city's team distributed information through a daily newsletter and posted more information in the halls and on all monitors and screens.

"The mayor's trafficking team and volunteers also went cot to cot to place notes in English and Spanish, warning residents about any traffickers recruiting in the shelters or through social media with offers to stay with people who may later make them 'pay' by forcing them into prostitution, stripping or pornography," the statement read.

The city warns of false job offers that could lead to labor trafficking and let displaced persons know that there is help available. The same cot notes were distributed at the NRG shelter.

In the long term, the mayor's office is focusing on developing a robust labor trafficking prevention response in conjunction with community groups that work with day laborers.

"The mayor's office is also working with the federal government to supplement the long-standing sex-trafficking response while doing what it can to mitigate the rise in sex for sale," the press release noted. "Mayor [Sylvester] Turner wants to take all preventative action to mitigate labor and sex trafficking to the extent possible.

To that effect, the Mayor's Office is focusing on:

1. Redesigning its Watch for Traffick media campaign to indicate the nexus between natural disasters and a rise in trafficking.
2. Finalizing an executive order to ensure Houston engages in safe labor contracting practices.
3. Developing a long-term effort to educate businesses about the *David, et al. v. Signal International, LLC, et al.* case in which Indian guest workers were trafficked for their labor after Hurricane Katrina through abuse of the H2B visa program, and encourage businesses ensure oversight for their contracts with the support of the Jones Day law firm.
4. The U.S. Department of State will assist the city with this and provide information on H2B visa applicants so the education efforts are strategic.
5. Creating a forum to share this information with the relevant consular offices so they can also share with their citizens.

6. The Mayor's Office is also collecting labor statistics for the hurricane recovery and for Houston in general so we know which consular offices to reach out to as we determine what countries workers were from.
7. Exploring partnership with a local day laborer organization to increase their laborer outreach and education; educating day laborers about purchasing sex and making sure they understand law enforcement deterrence efforts.
8. Tracking an increase in online sex ads and traffickers posting pictures of themselves buying supplies for their victims' children. The information has been forwarded to the appropriate law enforcement agencies.

According to an extensive packet sent out by the city's anti-human trafficking team earlier this year, "Houston is an epicenter of anti-human trafficking efforts."

Data from Polaris research showed that between December 2007 and June 2015 there were 717 confirmed cases of human trafficking in Houston.

"These numbers though fail to capture the magnitude of the problem in Houston. While data continues to evolve, one thing is certain: the Mayor's Office will take a 365 day-a-year approach to address human trafficking with a comprehensive, local-level approach," the statement earlier this year read.

Data from the Polaris study showed that nationwide there had been 5,544 cases of human trafficking over the 2007-15 time span. Of that, 4,136 (75%) were solely for sex trafficking, meaning those manipulated into trafficking went into prostitution, pornography and online sex ads and videos. Of the remaining numbers, 721 were labor trafficking and 178 for both sex and labor trafficking. An additional 559 were for unidentified trafficking.

Houston's numbers broken down in that same time frame are:

**544** — Sex trafficking

**115** — Labor trafficking

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**21** — Sex and labor trafficking

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**37** — Non-specified trafficking

**The top three sex trafficking venues were:**

1. Commercial front brothels, such as illicit massage businesses
2. Hotels and motels
3. Residential brothels

**The top three labor trafficking venues were:**

1. Domestic servitude
  2. Traveling sales crews, such as magazine sales crews
  3. Restaurant and food establishm
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