

New Pennsylvania laws to protect victims of human trafficking go into effect today, September 2, 2014.

Human trafficking is modern day slavery and this crime is happening in Pennsylvania, across the United States and worldwide. Traffickers use force, fraud and coercion to manipulate victims into engaging in commercial sex acts, or labor or services, in exchange for something of monetary value. One of the fastest growing criminal enterprises in the world, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that the industry generates more than \$32 billion per year. According to Polaris Project, the average entry of children into sex trafficking is age 12-15 and runaway youth are high risk for exploitation by traffickers.

Pennsylvania is now on the way to helping end this horrific crime and protect the victims who are exploited by traffickers. Senate Bill 75, introduced by Senator Stewart Greenleaf(R-Montgomery County) and co-sponsored by Sen. Dinniman and Sen. Leach, was passed by the Pennsylvania General Assembly on June 30, 2014 and signed by Governor Corbett on July 2, 2014. Now known as Act 105, this legislation amends Pennsylvania's Crimes Code (Title 18) and Civil Code (Title 42) to revise laws regarding human trafficking. Pennsylvania's old law did not include a definition of sex trafficking or sexual servitude. Act 105 now includes new definitions of sex trafficking in the Crimes Code, providing prosecutors with important tools to charge traffickers with felony offenses when they engage in conduct that subjects a person to sexual servitude or sex trafficking. Penalties are increased when the victim is a minor.

Additional offenses are created if a person prevents or restricts an individual's ability to move or travel by destroying, concealing, or confiscating the person's passport, immigration or other government documents. The Act also increases fines and penalties against individuals and businesses involved in the crime of human trafficking and adds procedures for seizing and forfeiting assets. Forfeitures will be used to help to fund investigation and prosecution of human trafficking crimes and to establish grant programs and services to victims of human trafficking.

Protections for victims are expanded to ensure that their name is not disclosed during prosecution and requires the court to give "first consideration" for pretrial diversion programs. Act 105 also allows a victim of human trafficking to petition the court to vacate prior convictions where the offense was the direct result of human trafficking. Act 105 also establishes a civil cause of action so that victims may seek compensatory and punitive damages along with other appropriate relief against their traffickers.

Many groups around the state, including members of the Pennsylvania Human Trafficking Advocacy Work Group, Pennsylvania's network of rape crisis and domestic violence centers, along with governmental agencies, are working to develop public awareness and training programs as well as coordinate services for victims of human trafficking. To learn more about these efforts and how you can help in Bucks County go to www.bcatpa.org. The Polaris Project operates the National Human Trafficking Resources Center and Human Trafficking Hotline and can connect you with other groups in Pennsylvania. You can learn more by visiting [Polaris Project Here](#) If you or a person you know is the victim of human trafficking you may contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text BeFree (233733) to get help.