

Human Trafficking

Report to the Legislative Research Commission

Department for Community Based Services
Cabinet for Health and Family Services

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Introduction

In accordance with Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 620.029(2)(b), the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (cabinet/CHFS) submits an annual report outlining the cabinet's response for child victims of human trafficking. This report details the cabinet's efforts to implement the requirements of the Human Trafficking Victims' Rights Act of 2013 (Act), which includes ensuring the safety of child victims, collaboration with multiple agencies during investigations, and the continuation of efforts to increase staff skill level to better serve victims. The report provides data regarding the number of reports received involving an alleged child victim of human trafficking, assessment findings, and services provided.

Section I: DCBS Human Trafficking Program Overview

The cabinet's Department for Community Based Services (department/DCBS) works closely with community partners including law enforcement, service providers, and other professionals to build a stronger community-based response to human trafficking cases. DCBS staff participate in human trafficking task force and coalition meetings across the state, including the Kentucky Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force, Northern Kentucky Violence Prevention Task Force, and the Lexington Human Trafficking Coalition. Department staff also participate in subcommittees related to victim services. The cabinet investigates all allegations of human trafficking regarding individuals under the age of 18, regardless of the perpetrator's status as a caretaker or non-caretaker, per KRS 620.030(3).

The 2024 reporting period marks the fourth and final year of the cabinet's Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking Initiative, funded by the Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). As part of this initiative, the cabinet worked with partners to develop and implement a human trafficking training series for department staff and community partners. This series includes the following trainings: Human Trafficking 101; An Overview, Screening and Identification of Human Trafficking; Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth; Labor Trafficking of Children and Youth; Familial Trafficking of Children and Youth; and a Multidisciplinary Training of Trainers. DCBS, in partnership with Jordan Greenbaum, MD, developed the Young Child Screen For (Sex and Labor) Trafficking/Exploitation (YCSTE). This innovative tool screens for risk of human trafficking in children under the age of 13 in a social service or health care setting. These trainings that were created for DCBS staff, Private Child Caring and Private Child Placing agencies staff to complete have given individuals a better knowledge base and awareness of human trafficking. The trainings have been completed more than 12,000 times, noting some individuals taking multiple trainings because of their roles within their agency from 2020 to 2024. Data is still being collected as these trainings are all still active.

Section II: Kentucky Human Trafficking Child Victim Investigations

Historical Data

Each reporting period begins on October 1st and ends on September 30th of the following year. Between reporting periods 2013 and 2023, there have been 2,221 reports of alleged human trafficking, involving 2,683 unique alleged child victims made to the agency. The largest increase in reports received was between reporting year 2020 and reporting year 2021. One possible reason for this was the increase in training and awareness which the cabinet and other community partners were providing during this time. Since reporting year 2020, the cabinet has continued to see an increase each year in the number of reports received concerning allegations of human trafficking and the number of alleged child victims.

Reports of alleged human trafficking have increased since 2013. Since his time as Attorney General, Governor Andy Beshear has made fighting human trafficking and increasing awareness of it a core mission. He has worked with community partners and organizations to increase awareness of human trafficking and signs of human trafficking to help law enforcement officers and citizens be vigilant about noticing and reporting it. As Attorney General, Governor Beshear's Department of Criminal Investigations partnered with the Polaris Project and the Kentucky State Police to streamline responses to reports, including reports to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888). Then-Attorney General Beshear also attributed accomplishments in fighting human trafficking to federal grants like the three-year \$1.5 million U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Office Victims of Crime grant his office received in partnership with the Catholic Charities of Louisville in 2016. That grant assisted agencies and the Kentucky Human Trafficking Task Force in researching and collecting data, educating local law enforcement and increasing direct victim services. His Attorney General's office also teamed with the Transit Authority of River City (TARC) to train hundreds of TARC managers, dispatchers, and bus drivers on identifying and reporting human trafficking, and his Office of Victim's Advocacy trained thousands of people in victim advocacy services. Governor Beshear also formed a partnership with the Truckers Against Trafficking Coalition in 2016 to offer training for drivers and truck stop employees to recognize and report human trafficking. His office did the same with the hotel industry to train employees and pulled together other groups like the Kentucky Baptist Convention to help in the fight.

Governor Beshear and the Kentucky State Police annually recognize January as Human Trafficking Prevention Month, and First Lady Brittainy Beshear serves on the National Coalition of Human Sex trafficking and continually urges Kentuckians to watch for signs of human trafficking. In 2021 Governor Beshear announced the Commonwealth received a \$1 million U.S. Department of Justice grant to help the Department for Community Based Services engage with agencies that serve children to develop and implement a council on human trafficking prevention and awareness, launch a human trafficking and child labor screening tool to identify high-risk children, and hire a full-time child protection specialist. In September 2021, the Kentucky State Police were part of a multistate human trafficking sting called Operation United Front that rescued 21 victims and led to the arrest of 41 people. The Kentucky State Police organized and led Kentucky's effort in Bowling Green, Elizabethtown, McCracken County and northern Kentucky. All of these efforts have helped Kentuckians become more aware of human trafficking to report alleged trafficking when they think they see signs of it.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the number of reports received by the cabinet per reporting period, from 2013 through 2024. Please note that variation in data reporting is expected due to investigative timeframes for completion of investigative assessment, and the subsequent determination of findings.

Figure 1



Current Reporting Period

As illustrated in Figure 1, DCBS received 467 reports of alleged human trafficking in the 2024 reporting period. This is an 18.5% increase in reports from reporting year 2023 to reporting year 2024. These reports involved 557 alleged child victims, including both sex and labor trafficking. This is a 12.5% increase in number of reported alleged victims from reporting year 2023 to reporting year 2024. Of the 467 reports received, 444 reports involved sex trafficking, 21 reports involved labor trafficking, and 2 reports contained both labor and sex trafficking allegations. The increase in reporting has a positive correlation with the numerous statewide awareness and training campaigns that continue to receive support from the Governor, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, and countless law enforcement and advocacy partners

Some of these allegations included:

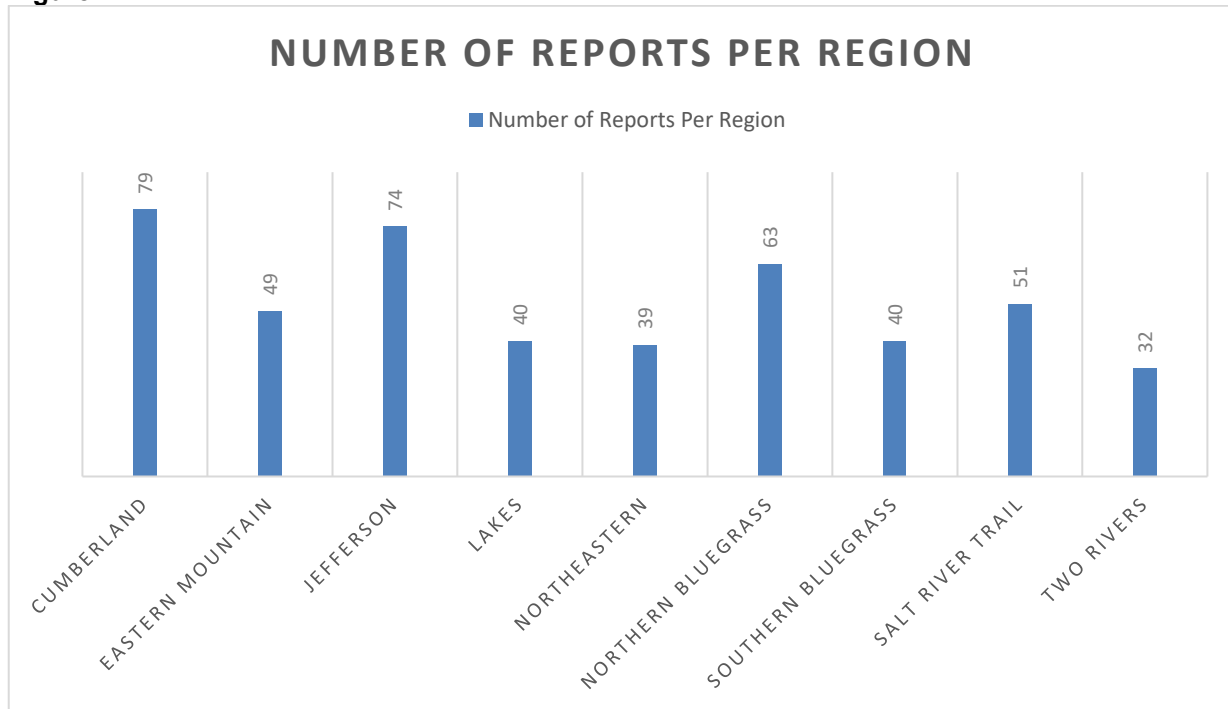
- Familial sex trafficking involving drugs, money, or something else of value.
- Children forced to participate in “survival sex” activities to acquire basic needs such as shelter, food, etc.
- Children being solicited for Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) through online platforms and social media.
- Children being forced to work while their pay is withheld.
- Children being defrauded regarding work and other activities.

Geographic Area

During this reporting period, the Cumberland Service Region received 79 reports of child trafficking, the highest number of any region across the state. The Cumberland Service Region encompasses the I-75 corridor south of Madison County to the Tennessee state line. The Jefferson Service Region had the second highest number of reports at 74, while the Northern Bluegrass Service Region had the third highest number of reports at 63. The data shown in Figure 2 details the number of reports received across all nine of the DCBS service regions and indicates that human trafficking is an issue impacting urban, suburban, and rural communities in

Kentucky. Every region except Two Rivers Service Region, saw an increase in the number of human trafficking reports received during this reporting year. This increase in received reports, especially in the Cumberland Service Region, could be attributed to awareness and training efforts that occurred. All department staff are attending Human Trafficking trainings created through OVC grant funding. The Attorney General’s office focused efforts to increase awareness of human trafficking through the Your Eyes Save Lives initiative.

Figure 2



Victim Demographics

For this reporting period, of the alleged victims, 448 were female, 102 were male, three identified as transgender/non-binary, and four where the information on gender was pending or unknown. For unknown or pending information, the report concerned “unknown” children in which the cabinet was unable to locate, or the investigation has not been finalized at the time of this report. During this reporting year, the cabinet reported a 12% increase in the number of reported male alleged victims.

While most reports involved American-born alleged victims, the Cabinet also received several reports regarding children who were foreign-born. As shown in Figure 5, DCBS received reports involving 530 American-born children and reports involving 22 foreign-born children and five children where their country of origin is unknown. According to the American Immigration Council website, there is 19,300 immigrant children residing in Kentucky. This is 0.02% of the total child population in Kentucky. The 22 foreign born children who were reported to the Cabinet for allegations of being trafficked make up 0.04% of the total child immigrant population.

During this reporting period, the alleged victims’ ages ranged from under one year to 18. There are eight alleged victims where the age is unknown, as these allegations contained unknown children with unknown ages. The average age of alleged victims for this reporting period is 13.

Figures 3, 4, and 5 provide data by the alleged victims gender, race/ethnicity, and country of

origin.

Figure 3

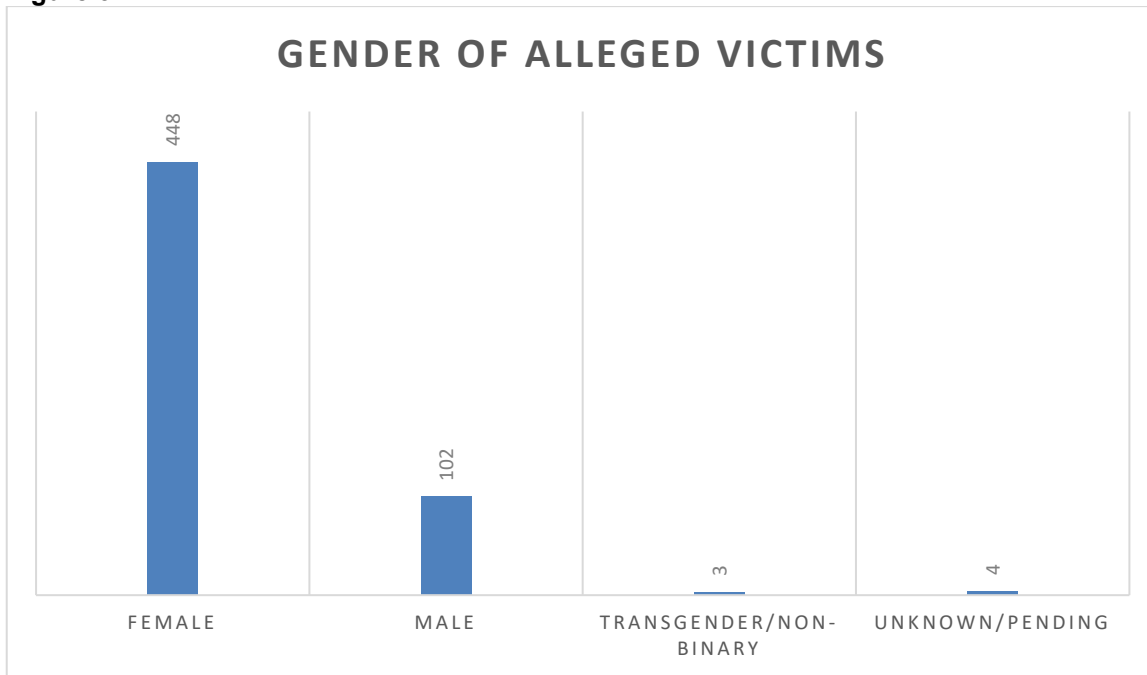


Figure 4

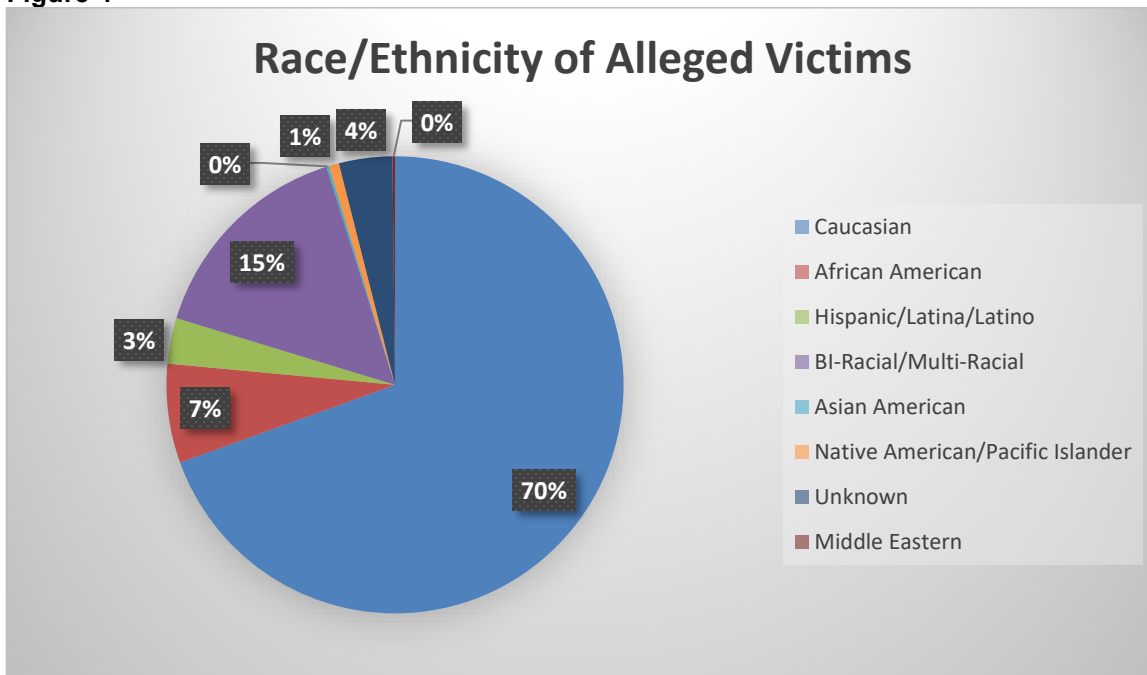
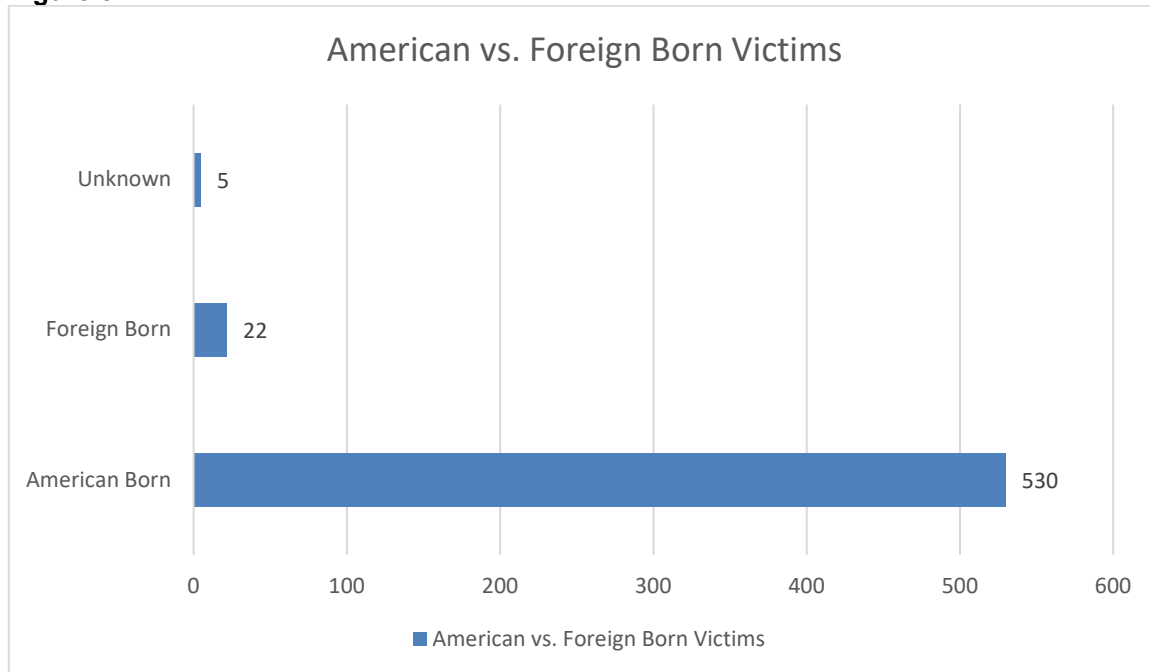


Figure 5



Victim Placement

Of the 467 reports received regarding 557 alleged victims, 314 alleged victims were in their home when the allegations of trafficking were reported, 27 were in DCBS foster care, 36 were in private child-placing (PCP) foster care, 90 were with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, 27 were in detention, 24 were in a private child-caring (PCC) placement, 21 were in a hospital, 8 were listed as homeless/unaccompanied minor and 10 were listed as missing or absent from their placement at the time the allegations were received. It should be noted that while the disclosure or report was made while the child was placed in this setting, the maltreatment may have occurred in a previous setting.

Throughout the reporting period, 43 alleged victims were removed from their home due to safety concerns related to allegations of human trafficking, 40 of these 43 alleged victims were removed due to human trafficking and another reason, such as a dependency action, to ensure the child received services, concerns of abuse or neglect within the home environment, or additional safety concerns of the child. There were 312 children involved in allegations of human trafficking who were not removed from their home; however, some of those alleged victims were already in an alternative placement when the allegations were disclosed. Currently, information related to removal of a child due to human trafficking allegations, or another reason, is pending verification for 202 alleged victims. DCBS Child Protection Branch staff are working directly with each service region to confirm information to ensure accurate data is reported. Placement settings for the children who were removed consist of relative or fictive kin caregivers, DCBS foster care, PCP foster care, and PCC facilities.

Assessment Findings

The commercial exchange of substances prohibited by law were identified in the trafficking of 176 children.

At this time, criminal charges have been filed against perpetrators in 31 cases of reported human trafficking and no criminal charges were filed in 199 cases. Information related to criminal charges is pending in 237 cases at the time of this report due to the nature of these investigations.

Some of the criminal charges associated with these cases include failing to report human trafficking, engaging in organized crime, use of a minor in a sex performance, procurement of a minor, distributing sexually explicit images without consent, custodial interference, distribution of obscene matter to minors, distributing of matter portraying a sexual performance by a minor, rape, voyeurism, unlawful transaction with a minor, sodomy, human trafficking, kidnapping, prostitution, production of child pornography, possession of child pornography, conspiracy to produce child pornography, and promoting human trafficking.

The cabinet has worked jointly with numerous law enforcement agencies, including local police departments, local sheriff offices, state police, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) utilizing a multidisciplinary approach to ensure the safety of the alleged victims, integrity of the joint investigations, and provision of the most appropriate services to the children and their families/caregivers.

A caretaker was alleged to be the perpetrator of human trafficking in 203 cases. Examples of caretakers include a non-relative caretaker, babysitters/care providers, parent paramours, etc. There was a 21.5% increase in the number of caretaker reports received.

A family member was the alleged perpetrator in 176 cases. Familial trafficking is when someone related to the child is involved in facilitating the trafficking, such as a parent, grandparent, siblings, grandparents, etc. There was a 22% increase in familial trafficking reports from report year 2023 to report year 2024. Examples of familial trafficking include parents, grandparents, siblings, or other close family members. In some cases, the family member fell into the caregiver category, such as a parent, and in other cases the family member fell into the non-caretaker category, such as a sibling or extended family member who did not have care, custody, or control over the child.

A non-caretaker was alleged to be the perpetrator of human trafficking in 263 cases. Examples of non-caretaker perpetrators include parent paramours, other children/peers, non-relatives, child’s significant other, family member’s substance dealer, family friends, traffickers, and buyers. There was a 15.8% increase in the number of non-caretaker reports received this reporting year compared to last.

This is not an exhaustive list of the perpetrators and their relationships with the child and/or family in any given reporting period. Table 1 shows the findings at the time of this report.

Table 1 Human Trafficking Investigative Findings (Reporting period 2024)

| Caretaker | | Non-Caretaker | |
|------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| Substantiated | 41 | Human Trafficking Confirmed | 57 |
| Unsubstantiated | 73 | Human Trafficking Not Confirmed | 99 |
| Pending | 89 | Pending | 105 |
| Services Needed | 1 | Unable to Locate | 2 |
| Total | 204 | Total | 263 |

The provision of services related to trafficking is not contingent on substantiated findings. The cabinet offers/provides services to all alleged victims of trafficking. Some of these services include placement in out-of-home care; forensic interviews and medical exams through children’s advocacy centers; trauma-informed screening and assessment; individual, family, and group

therapy; and exploitation prevention education. Families/caregivers of survivors participated in services related to therapeutic intervention for trauma, substance use, and parenting, among other things. Specialists on the Child Protection Branch, Clinical Services and Out-of-Home Care branches provide consultation and guidance on a case-by-case basis to ensure that each child/family is connected with appropriate services and supports to meet their unique needs.

Section III: Conclusions and Program Enhancement

The cabinet continues to use a multidisciplinary approach to address allegations of human trafficking, collaborating with community partners ranging from law enforcement, mental health professionals, medical treatment providers, and others, to ensure that alleged victims receive the most appropriate services and supports. Specialists in the DCBS Child Protection Branch consult with field personnel, as needed, to provide guidance and technical assistance during the assessment process. Children participate in forensic interviews at children's advocacy centers, as necessary, for trafficking cases per Kentucky statute. During reporting year 2024, 234 children were interviewed at the Child Advocacy Center, 112 children were not interviewed at the Child Advocacy Center, and this information is pending for 211 children. The cabinet informs law enforcement of each report of human trafficking it receives. The cabinet worked jointly on 251 human trafficking cases during the current reporting period, and this information is pending for 158 cases.

The cabinet anticipates an increase in identification of human trafficking victims, which corresponds with an increase in screening, training, and collaborative efforts. Increasing awareness of child trafficking across the state promotes collaborative, multidisciplinary efforts to ensure the provision of appropriate, trauma informed services to victims and their families. Increased identification of human trafficking and assessment of alleged victims' and their families' needs will support the development of a robust service array to meet the needs of these survivors in their home communities.

