



Human Trafficking Task Force

Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force Report

April 2025





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Human Trafficking Task Force

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Task Force Agencies

Ohio Department of Agriculture

Ohio Department of Commerce

Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities

Ohio Department of Education

Ohio Department of Health

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

Ohio Department of Medicaid

Ohio Department of Children and Youth
(including the Ohio Children's Trust Fund)

Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Ohio Department of Public Safety

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

Ohio Department of Transportation

Ohio Department of Youth Services

Ohio State Cosmetology and Barber Board

Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission

State Medical Board of Ohio

Letter from the State Anti-Trafficking Director

Dear Ohioans:

Since the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force was created in 2012, Ohio has built a strong coordinated response to human trafficking. Throughout this report you will see the impact our task force is having on survivor care, including critical milestones accomplished in the areas of prevention, protection, and prosecution during 2023-2024.

This expedited progress is largely due to Governor Mike DeWine's leadership and historic \$9 million investment to combat human trafficking in Ohio's most recent operating budget, demonstrating his commitment to bolstering our state's anti-trafficking response. Ohio is considered a leader in the anti-trafficking movement, and with dedicated resources, we will continue to advance and model this important work for other states while at the same time having a direct impact on the lives of human trafficking survivors.

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As I reflect upon and celebrate the progress we've made, I also recognize how much work we still must accomplish. Together, there are concrete steps we can take to improve our systems of care and increase the support for individuals and communities most vulnerable to human trafficking. I'm constantly reminded that change happens on both the micro and macro levels and, as a state, we must provide practical solutions to support both in every community throughout Ohio.

We can listen to those with lived experience to improve our service development and delivery, centering their voices in this work. Survivors are the experts on best practice, trauma responsive treatment, prevention, legislative reform, and holding perpetrators accountable.

We can equip and empower our local communities to take a multidisciplinary approach to human trafficking to build a strong anti-trafficking response. The value of the robust technical assistance our office provided to communities developing their local response during 2023-2024 cannot be overstated.

Building on the successes of the last two years and in an ongoing effort to close gaps in our response continuum, the 2025-2026 priorities were developed in partnership with state agencies and nonprofits. The Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force remains dedicated to implementing this strategy through intentional collaboration with state and local parties, as the history of Ohio's anti-trafficking movement has made it clear: the key to success is collaboration across systems, disciplines, and communities.

The trauma endured by survivors of human trafficking is one of the greatest forms of injustice, and we as individuals, leaders, and state agencies have the responsibility to use every resource at our disposal to eradicate this crime. Every person has a purpose and a role in this work. Thank you for your partnership.



Kelli Cary
State Anti-Trafficking Director

Building a Coordinated State Response

The Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force was created by Executive Order in 2012 to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts of cabinet agencies and establish a statewide strategy to prevent trafficking and support survivors. In 2021, Governor DeWine signed an Executive Order to expand the Task Force, adding five agencies to the initiative. Today, the task force is comprised of 16 state agencies and supported by the State Anti-Trafficking Director and her team of anti-trafficking subject matter experts.

Under Governor DeWine's leadership, the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force has continued to marshal the resources of the state to ensure a coordinated effort to prevent and respond to human trafficking. In Ohio's FY23/24 operating budget, Governor DeWine made a historic investment to support these efforts, allocating \$9 million to combat human trafficking.

This funding was crucial in the local and statewide initiatives highlighted in this report and overseen by the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, which prioritizes a holistic response to human trafficking by identifying and closing gaps in prevention, systems of care, and prosecution.

In the last two years, the Governor's cabinet agencies developed and implemented a wide range of policy goals and initiatives aimed at preventing trafficking, protecting survivors, and prosecuting offenders. See "[Appendix A](#)" for the Priorities Scorecard, summarizing the priorities and progress.

Duties, Responsibilities, and Operational Capabilities of the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force

- a. Develop and oversee the implementation of the state's anti-trafficking priorities through task force agencies and partnerships with community-based organizations. These priorities and progress on these initiatives will be highlighted throughout this report.
- b. Assist anti-trafficking coalitions, victim service providers, and communities in identifying gaps in their continuum of care for survivors to improve local coordinated response.
- c. Provide training and technical assistance to service providers, state agencies, law enforcement, and anti-trafficking coalitions throughout the state to improve Ohio's capacity to identify, prevent, and respond to trafficking. Topics of training and technical assistance may include building survivor-centered programs; state and federal anti-trafficking laws; policy guidance on issues such as child protection, housing, and benefit assistance for survivors (i.e. Medicaid); and any subject that may improve an organization or region's ability to prevent trafficking or support survivors.
- d. Provide anti-trafficking training opportunities for state employees, investigators, and other professionals. Facilitate in-person or web-based trainings and host a free 50-minute training video on [humantrafficking.ohio.gov](https://www.humantrafficking.ohio.gov) that tracks participation by agency and offers continuing education credit for participating licensing boards.
- e. Develop and disseminate targeted resources and job aids related to trafficking, such as child trafficking response protocols, community assessment tools, guidance on state and federal benefits for survivors, and other materials for audiences including children services, juvenile justice, law enforcement, victim services, and individuals most vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. These resources are available at [humantrafficking.ohio.gov](https://www.humantrafficking.ohio.gov).
- f. Analyze statewide data.
- g. Recommend survivor-informed policy.
- h. Manage federal and state funding.

Supporting the Task Force

The Ohio Department of Public Safety, Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) houses the state anti-trafficking director and a team of subject-matter experts charged with overseeing task force efforts. Duties include providing programmatic assistance for anti-trafficking stakeholders, developing statewide policy, collecting and analyzing statewide data related to trafficking, facilitating advanced training on trafficking, releasing strategic funding opportunities, and working closely with organizations and communities to build capacity to respond to human trafficking at the local level.



Kelli Cary, MSSA, LISW-S
State Anti-Trafficking Director



Rebekkah O'Bryan
Child and Youth Anti-Trafficking Specialist



Veronica Scherbauer
Anti-Trafficking Program Specialist



Kathy Chen
Special Population Anti-Trafficking Specialist



Micayla Wilson
Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Administrator



Kristina Nicholson
Social Science Research Specialist

Collaborating to Improve Systems of Care

The impact of the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force depends on both the individual efforts of member agencies and the synergistic results of collaboration between these agencies. Below are ways Task Force agencies collaborated in 2023 and 2024 to create meaningful change across state systems.



Haleigh Young, Department of Children and Youth presenting at 2024 Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) Conference.

The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) and Office of Criminal Justice Services updated screening guidance for children services agencies, providing detailed instruction on the screening of human trafficking as a form of abuse and neglect. These new guidelines are expected to be shared with local public children services agencies in the spring of 2025. DCY and OCJS also collaborated to develop multiple survivor-informed, evidence-based resources and technical trainings to aid children's services agencies in identification, safety assessment, safety planning, case planning, and providing multi-disciplinary, trauma responsive services to child and youth victims of human trafficking. You can [download the screening resources here](#). See "[Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims](#)" to learn more.

The Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) and Office of Criminal Justice Services continued joint funding of an Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison, who provides intensive training and technical assistance to DYS personnel and local juvenile justice professionals on identifying youth trafficking and building an effective response protocol. See "[Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims](#)" to learn more.



DYS Staff on #wearblueday for Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) met with the Office of Criminal Justice Services to discuss new virtual and in-person training opportunities that will take place in 2025. DODD staff continue to track incidents of human trafficking through their Unusual Incident Reports, now reflected on the [InnovateOhio Human Trafficking Data Dashboard](#).

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) continues to increase awareness throughout Ohio and the country. During 2023-2024, ODOT:

- Continued to add human trafficking awareness information to the private plane registration packets mailed to private plane owners. There are about 8,000 packets mailed each year.
- Continued to add human trafficking awareness information to every oversize/overweight special hauling permit issued by ODOT. The permits are provided to truckers driving through Ohio with an oversize and/or overweight load. There are an average of 350,000 oversize/overweight special hauling permits issued each year.
- Continued placing tear-off stickers which provide the National Human Trafficking Hotline phone number in every restroom stall at each of the rest areas overseen by ODOT. ODOT also displays awareness materials via posters and televisions in many of the 84 rest areas it oversees.

- Continued the Empowerment Through Employment program to provide skills training and employment opportunities for identified survivors.
- Continued to collaborate with organizations in Ohio and throughout the U.S. to assist in developing their anti-trafficking initiatives. Worked in collaboration with Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) to cofound a Multi-State Anti-Trafficking Working Group to share strategies, best practices, and resources.
- Developed and conducted awareness training for transportation professionals.
- Participated in a National Transportation Research Board subcommittee pertaining to human trafficking and transportation while working to develop a toolkit for DOTs nationwide.

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC)

DRC Human Trafficking Strategic Planning Committee

The DRC Human Trafficking Strategic Planning Committee formed in 2018 and is comprised of DRC staff from Behavioral Health, Unit Management, Re-Entry, the Adult Parole Authority, Victim Services, and the Inspector's Office's Intelligence Unit; representatives from DRC's female and male facilities; community partners; and the State Anti-Human Trafficking Director. The Committee continued convening in 2023 and 2024 to facilitate ongoing improvement to DRC's anti-trafficking efforts.



The Ohio Reformatory for Women Wear Blue Day Event.

DRC Behavioral Health Operations Human Trafficking Screening and Treatment

In 2013, DRC Behavioral Health Operations began screening for human trafficking at reception centers and post reception by staff referrals at DRC facilities. At all facility security levels, when an assessment indicates potential trafficking, the survivor is linked to trauma treatment provided by DRC Behavioral Health Operations clinicians and/or additional supportive programming.

- 2023: DRC completed 17,210 screenings with 401 affirmative human trafficking screenings
- 2024: DRC completed 22,539 screenings with 480 affirmative human trafficking screenings

DRC Chief Inspector's Office Intelligence Services Unit

- Intelligence analysts identified perpetrators who may be involved in human trafficking occurring inside and outside of state prisons. The Chief Inspector's Office also works with human trafficking law enforcement task forces to provide intelligence support to investigations.
- The DRC Chief Inspector's Office Intelligence Services Unit monitored more than 50 incarcerated persons convicted of ORC 2905.32 Trafficking In Persons and more than 100 incarcerated persons convicted of Compelling Prostitution (ORC 2907.21), Promoting Prostitution (ORC 2907.22), Engaging in Prostitution (ORC 2907.231), or Advertising Illicit Massage Services (ORC 2927.17).
- The DRC Chief Inspector's Office Intelligence Services Unit received six requests for assistance related to investigating human trafficking.
- The DRC Chief Inspector's Office Digital Forensic Unit conducted forensic examinations on nine devices that identified CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Materials).

DRC Adult Parole Authority (APA)

The APA participated in the SOAP Project (Saving our Adolescents from Prostitution) in 2023 and 2024, collaborating with community partners to provide hotels with hygiene items that advertise the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

DRC Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance

In 2023, the DRC Correctional Training Academy partnered with the DRC Human Trafficking Strategic Planning Committee to create and add specific Human Trafficking Training to the department's FY 23 and FY 24 Training Plans.

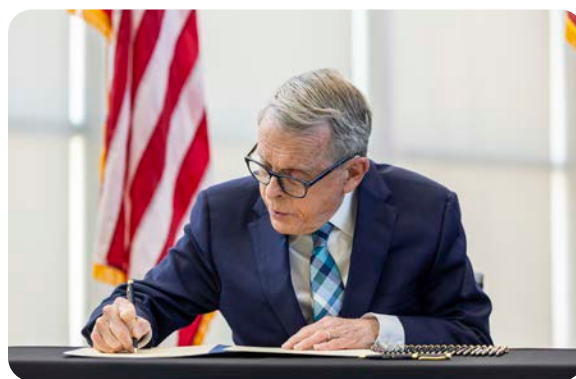
The Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) has a state funded medical assistance category for trafficking victims who are not U.S. citizens and who have not yet received a T-Visa from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Currently, 27 individuals are enrolled in this specific category. Additionally, ODM utilizes a dedicated unit to process applications and annual renewals for these individuals to ensure timely and correct determinations. In 2025-2026 ODM plans to increase efforts related to technical assistance by creating a desk aid for local counties on the Non-Citizen Victim of Trafficking (NCVOT) Medicaid Application and Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) Eligibility process.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) — in partnership with ODM, the Office of Criminal Justice Services, and the anti-trafficking nonprofit Advocating Opportunity — analyzed the current benefits application and administration process for survivors of human trafficking to identify areas for improvement. This analysis revealed gaps in local understanding regarding OTIP benefits eligibility process for foreign national survivors. During 2025, ODJFS and their partners plan to increase efforts related to training and technical assistance for local agencies, including developing a desk aid to support employees in administering benefits for foreign national survivors.

Key Legislation and Policy Initiatives

In July 2024, Governor DeWine signed Senate Bill 214 into law, improving access to criminal records relief for survivors of sex and labor trafficking. This law expands the availability of records expungement to include any misdemeanor or felony of the fourth or fifth degree that is a direct result of the applicant's trafficking victimization, amending the previous requirement that limited expungement for survivors to prostitution-related offenses. The expungement expansion reflects the grassroots advocacy efforts of survivors and victim services providers and demonstrates Ohio's commitment to respond with action to the needs of survivors.

In 2025 and 2026, the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force will remain committed to supporting survivors and Ohio's anti-trafficking professionals by analyzing existing policy and legislation, identifying systemic gaps in guidance and rules, and pursuing survivor-informed changes that prevent trafficking and protect survivors.

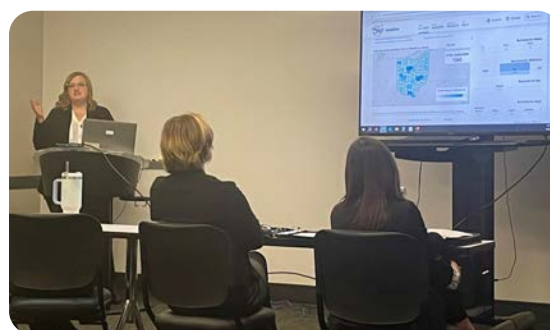


Governor DeWine signing Senate Bill 214 into law. The law allows a victim of human trafficking to expunge certain criminal records.

Centralizing Ohio's Human Trafficking State Agency Data

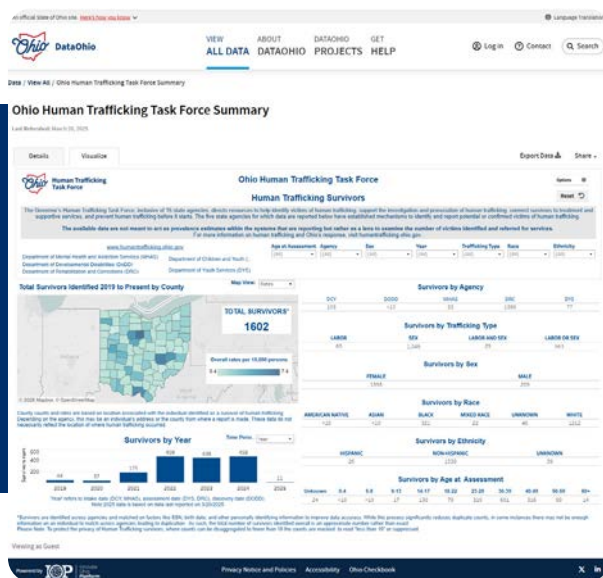
Ohio's trafficking incident rate has been difficult to measure due to the nature of the crime, underreporting and under-identifying, and the lack of a centralized database where human trafficking data from multiple sectors is stored. Nonprofit organizations (such as victim service providers) and criminal justice agencies (such as law enforcement and courts) often report their trafficking-related data to different entities, resulting in fractured snapshots of data rather than a complete picture of the true prevalence throughout the state. Historically, Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force member agencies reported annual data on the number of human trafficking victims identified through their respective systems. To improve data collection among state systems, more accurately depict the totality of trafficking in Ohio, and increase accessibility of data for the public, policymakers, and researchers, the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force partnered with InnovateOhio to establish a centralized human trafficking data dashboard.

The [Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force Summary](#) centralizes state agency data on the InnovateOhio platform. The dashboard houses the human trafficking data previously maintained separately by the Ohio departments of Youth Services, Children and Youth, Rehabilitation and Corrections, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Developmental Disabilities. The dashboard reflects the number of survivors identified and referred for services in Ohio by task force member agencies that screen for or receive reports of human trafficking.



Research Specialist Kristina Nicholson presents the Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force Summary.

By illuminating potential gaps in identification efforts and highlighting areas of heightened need, this centralized data supports Ohio's capacity to make informed policy and resource distribution decisions that bolster our anti-trafficking response. To provide an even more complete data picture, the task force plans to add new data sets in future phases from state anti-human trafficking program grantees and other nonprofit and law enforcement sources.



The human trafficking dashboard combines data from several state agencies into a centralized location to increase accessibility for the public, policy makers, and researchers.

Connecting School Districts to Human Trafficking Prevention Curricula

To accomplish a 2023/2024 goal to support awareness and prevention efforts in local school districts, the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force partnered with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Development to update module 4 of the required Safety and Violence Prevention training, which focuses on Preventing Child Abuse and Human Trafficking. The updated module equips educators and school staff to identify and appropriately respond to human trafficking.

Effective for the 2023/2024 school year, Ohio Senate Bill 288 (also known as Erin's Law) requires child sexual abuse and dating and sexual violence prevention education for K-12 students. To support districts in meeting this requirement, OCJS identified a developmentally appropriate, evidence-based train-the-trainer curriculum for K-12 students that also includes human trafficking prevention education (SPEAK UP Curriculum, developed by The Foundation United). Training to equip educational professionals on administering the SPEAK UP curriculum is available on Public School Works, the Learning Management System for school personnel used by more than 80 percent of Ohio districts.

Senate Bill 288 additionally requires school staff to receive in-service training on child sexual abuse and sexual violence prevention that is facilitated by law enforcement officers or prosecutors with experience in addressing such cases. In collaboration with law enforcement and prosecutors, OCJS created a training video for educators that meets this requirement.

- This education is critical for educators who often see our most vulnerable children. Through mandated training, they are equipped to recognize and respond empathetically to potential trafficking victims.
- Through interviews with educators and law enforcement officers, this training provides foundational human trafficking training as well as technical support for educators and school staff on recognizing trafficking, interacting with students who may have experienced trafficking or seem to be at an increased risk, and fulfilling their obligations as mandated reporters in the state of Ohio when trafficking is suspected or identified.



"Human Trafficking Awareness for School Staff" is available on the [Anti-Human Trafficking website](#).

Through a partnership with Public School Works, the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force reached 48,809 educators through the online Preventing Child Abuse and Human Trafficking Training (Module 4) and 204 educators through the Human Trafficking Awareness for School Staff training video.

Increasing Capacity for Victim Service Providers

In the biennial state budget, Governor DeWine's administration allocated an historic \$9 million investment to Ohio's human trafficking prevention and response efforts. As part of this investment, the Ohio Department of Public Safety's Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) developed the Direct Services for Victims of Human Trafficking grant program intended to improve capacity of community-based organizations to serve survivors of trafficking.

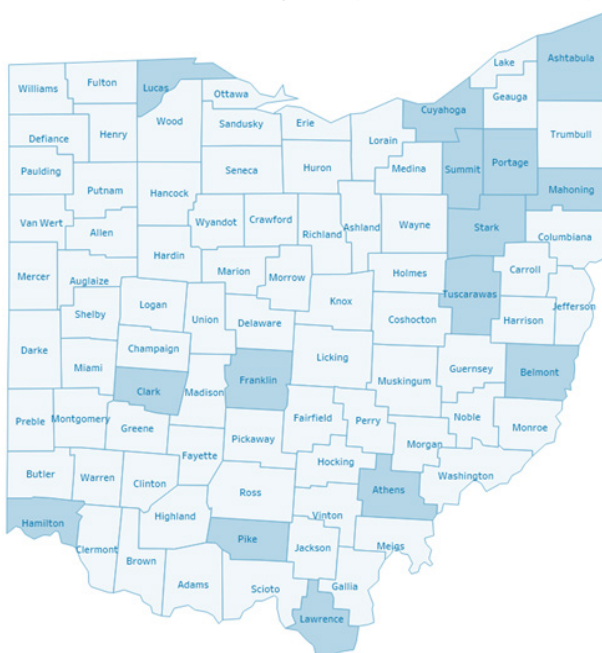
After issuing a request for proposals, 33 organizations were competitively selected as funding recipients, and OCJS administered a total of \$4.6 million to these state grantees.

In February 2024, Governor DeWine announced **\$4.6 million in funding to help victim service agencies** meet the needs of human trafficking survivors.

State Anti-Human Trafficking Grant Program

In responding to the request for proposals, applicants were required to outline how funding would improve their ability to respond directly to survivors of trafficking, establish that they are equipped to provide services to this population, describe how they plan to engage experts with lived experience in their programming, discuss their use of evidence-based tools for assessment and service planning, and identify how they would work with community parties to facilitate a local continuum of care for survivors.

As a condition of receiving funding, grantees were required to submit quarterly fiscal and narrative progress reports to OCJS. To maximize program impact, each grantee was also required to participate in a programmatic site visit with the Anti-Trafficking Team at OCJS to discuss funded programming, highlighting successes and troubleshooting challenges with subject-matter experts. To further support the capacity of grantees to serve survivors, the Anti-Trafficking Team at OCJS hosted quarterly technical assistance calls on a variety of topics related to best practices in anti-trafficking work.



***Figure 1.** Map of Ohio indicating county location of programs funded through the Direct Services Anti-Human Trafficking Grant Program. The map does not reflect program coverage, as several programs provide services in surrounding counties as well. Additionally, at least two programs offer services statewide.*

Funded Programs

Subgrantee	County
Hope and Healing Survivor Resource Center	Summit County
The Salvation Army	Franklin County/Central Ohio
Project Woman	Clark County
The Children's Advocacy Center of Portage County	Portage County
ALVIS House	Franklin County
Nationwide Children's Hospital	Franklin County
Canopy Child Advocacy Center	Cuyahoga County
Aultman Health Foundation	Stark County
Hope's Place Child Advocacy Center	Lawrence County
Gracehaven	Franklin County/Statewide
The Ohio State University STAR Recovery Center	Franklin County
Center for Addiction Treatment	Hamilton County
BLOC Ministries	Hamilton County/Statewide
Ohio Justice and Policy Center (OJPC)	Hamilton County/Montgomery County
Southeast, Inc.	Franklin County
Freedom a la Cart	Franklin County
Tri-County Help Center, Inc.	Belmont County
HOMESAFE, INC	Ashtabula County
Compass Family and Community Services	Mahoning County
Cleveland Rape Crisis Center	Cuyahoga County
Health Recovery Service, Inc	Athens County
The Salvation Army	Hamilton County
Cincinnati Union Bethel	Hamilton County
Advocating Opportunity	Lucas County
The MetroHealth System	Cuyahoga County
Collaborative to End Human Trafficking	Cuyahoga County
COMPASS Rape Crisis Center	Tuscarawas County
Sanctuary Night	Franklin County
The Recovery Council	Pike County
The SOAP Project	Franklin County
Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities	Franklin County
ASIA	Summit County/Statewide
Empower Her Network	Statewide

Grant Program Impact

Twenty-eight programs provided data on select performance indicators throughout the grant period, indicating the number of individuals identified and served through their project activities. Individuals served by funded programs include both those identified as experiencing human trafficking as well as those identified by programs as high-risk of human trafficking.

Individuals Identified and Served by Grant-Funded Programs

For reporting purposes for grant-funded programs, a survivor of human trafficking includes a victim of a severe form of human trafficking as defined by Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. § 7102(9). Human trafficking may be identified by a screening tool, assessment, or other objective information and/or professional insights, and does not require the victim's self-disclosure. Individuals at high-risk of human trafficking are persons who have been subject to situations that have indicators of human trafficking; however, more information is still needed to determine if they meet the definition of victim of human trafficking as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. § 7102(9).

For the reported periods in 2024, some 28 grant-funded programs reported a combined average of 432 new survivors of human trafficking identified per quarter, with a combined total average of 889 survivors of trafficking being served per quarter. In addition to survivors of human trafficking served by funded programs, there was also an average of 643 individuals identified as high-risk for trafficking served per quarter.

Survivor Outcomes

For those programs that provide ongoing services for survivors, assessments are also completed to examine a client's sufficiency across a number of life domains (e.g., employment/income, transportation, housing, mental health, etc.). While the assessment is meant to support case management and identify resource gaps for clients, it also allows for another lens to examine the program's impact.

Twenty-four grant-funded programs reported the implementation of an assessment as part of their programming. Programs were asked to report on those survivors who have been with programs long enough to have at least two assessments completed. Of those individuals reported by programs, more than 85% of individuals demonstrated an improvement in at least one life domain from their initial assessment to assessments completed after participating in services.

432

An average of 432 new individuals were identified as survivors of human trafficking by funded programs per quarter.

889

An average of 889 individuals identified as survivors of human trafficking were served per quarter by funded programs.

643

An average of 643 individuals at high-risk of human trafficking were served by funded programs per quarter.

Programs reported more than 85 percent of individuals who received ongoing program services indicated an increase in life stability factors.

Expanding Services for Child and Youth Victims

The Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force prioritizes building Ohio's capacity to holistically support youth victims of trafficking across a continuum, from facilitating community-based resources and programming that support youth in their homes of origin to building capacity of substitute caregivers to provide trauma responsive, treatment-oriented housing options for youth at every level of care. This priority requires investing in direct service organizations to provide care to youth survivors while simultaneously equipping child-serving systems and caregivers to recognize and respond to youth trafficking. To work toward these objectives, OCJS established a strategic partnership with Gracehaven, funding the expansion of its community-based care and education program to Montgomery and surrounding counties. This region was prioritized to enhance the local juvenile court's increased efforts to respond to youth survivors of trafficking and to support the growing network of congregate and substitute caregivers in the area.

Through a licensed therapeutic group home and a community-based comprehensive case management program, Gracehaven has served youth victims of trafficking throughout Ohio for nearly a decade. This project funded an education specialist, a clinician, and a team of case managers to meet with youth clients in the field, facilitate necessary referrals for additional services, advocate for the youth and families in local systems, provide accessible technical assistance to caregivers on supporting their youth, and engage youth in individualized psychoeducation to decrease their vulnerability to future victimization. Gracehaven has established referral partnerships with Montgomery County Children Services, Montgomery County Juvenile Court, and local service providers and has facilitated training for Montgomery County Children Services, local group homes, and local foster caregivers.

With the \$1 million grant award, Gracehaven was tasked with two primary objectives:

1. Providing intensive, wrap-around community-based services to trafficked youth and their families in Southwest Ohio.
2. Through training and technical assistance, increasing the capacity of local child-serving systems, families, and substitute caregivers to safely serve youth survivors of trafficking across a continuum of placement options.

Since the start of the funding period, Gracehaven's Montgomery County program has received case management referrals for 34 youth and provided training for more than 230 local caregivers or youth-serving professionals.

This program is ongoing. For up-to-date figures please contact AH7@dps.ohio.gov.

Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Trafficking

In 2017, OCJS was initially awarded three years of funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking grant program. Following subsequent competitive application processes, this funding was additionally awarded in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and again in FY 2023.

OCJS has utilized this funding to improve statewide efforts in identifying and responding to child trafficking through local and statewide juvenile justice and child protection initiatives, focusing on policy and protocol development and the provision of capacity-building training and technical assistance. As the direct recipient of funding, OCJS is tasked with managing the overall strategy of this program and sub-grants to key partners to advance project objectives. In the FY 2023 iteration of the grant, OCJS partners with:

- **Ohio Department of Youth Services**, which utilizes funding to employ a juvenile justice human trafficking liaison. This position is responsible for building the statewide juvenile justice system's capacity to identify and support youth who have experienced trafficking, inclusive of updating agency policy related to assessing for trafficking, providing training and technical assistance to DYS personnel, building referral partnerships with direct service organizations, and facilitating meaningful continued education for external child-serving professionals.
- **Ohio Department of Children and Youth**, which utilizes funding to employ an anti-human trafficking coordinator to improve the child protective system response to trafficking. This position is focused on providing training, technical assistance, and relevant resources for public children services agencies to support their ability to identify trafficking and develop a response protocol at the local level. The anti-human trafficking coordinator is essential in informing policy and guidance at the state level and then disseminating that guidance to the field in a way that can be practically applied.
- **Delaware, Hamilton, and Montgomery County juvenile courts** are funded to build Safe Harbor programs, which are diversionary programs for justice-involved youth survivors of trafficking. Each court employs a safe harbor coordinator who is charged with establishing the court's multidisciplinary efforts to identify, support, and divert from the formalized justice system youth who have experienced trafficking and exploitation. As previously funded courts during the FY 2020 iteration of the grant, Delaware and Hamilton County safe harbor coordinators also provide training and technical assistance to other jurisdictions throughout Ohio regarding the implementation of Safe Harbor programming.
- **Advocating Opportunity** is a nonprofit organization with established expertise in providing holistic legal and supportive services to survivors of trafficking throughout Ohio. With this partnership, funds support the involvement of Advocating Opportunity staff in trainings for child-serving professionals and also support a consulting relationship with an anti-trafficking subject-matter expert. This consultant informs all aspects of this project and is especially involved in developing and facilitating training on trauma-responsive approaches to serving youth survivors.

OVC Improving Outcomes Grant Objectives

OCJS and the subgrantees work to strengthen Ohio's support for youth survivors through the pursuit of three primary objectives:

1. **Expand the use of Ohio's safe harbor legal protections** for justice-involved youth victims of human trafficking to ensure victims are identified and connected to comprehensive recovery services.
2. **Build capacity of Ohio's child protective system** to identify and serve child victims of human trafficking and increase access to benefits for foreign national child victims.
3. **Prioritize the identification of and service delivery** to child and youth victims of labor trafficking in both the juvenile justice and child protective systems.

Training on Identifying and Responding to Youth Trafficking

The grant team offers a variety of advanced training options for child-serving professionals. Trainings are interactive, survivor-informed, and intended to equip the audience with practical skills that improve their ability to identify and support youth within their roles. Trainings can be provided onsite for requesting agencies at no cost. A selection of trainings is described below, but content can be tailored to the needs of the audience. To schedule a training, please visit the [Anti-Human Trafficking website](#).

Identifying and Responding to Youth Victims of Human Trafficking in the Child Protection System

8 hours, 6.5 CEUs

This interactive presentation, presented by a survivor led multi-disciplinary team in partnership with the Governor's Human Trafficking Task Force, will cover the following: defining human trafficking; screening referrals of human trafficking; screening children and youth for experiences of human trafficking; identifying victims of human trafficking in the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) assessing safety, child vulnerabilities and risk contributors in cases of human trafficking; safety planning with victims of human trafficking; case planning with victims of human trafficking; federal and state requirements guiding the child protection system's response to human trafficking; and building a multi-disciplinary, trauma-responsive approach to human trafficking.

This training meets the requirement that caseworkers and supervisors must take an Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) approved human trafficking training within their first two years of employment.

Identifying and Responding to Youth Victims of Human Trafficking in the Juvenile Justice System

8 hours, 6.5 CEUs

This interactive training is intended to equip juvenile justice professionals with the tools and skills needed to identify and respond to juvenile victims of trafficking in their own communities. Through activities, case studies, and the knowledge of subject matter experts, attendees will learn how to recognize signs of trafficking, understand dynamics of exploitative relationships, build empathy with youth who may be experiencing a trafficking situation, identify available resources to support youth who have been trafficked, and explore specific legal protections for justice-involved youth survivors.



Child and Youth Anti-Trafficking Specialist Rebekkah O'Bryan presents anti-trafficking training.



Emily Dunlap, Advocating Opportunity, and Chelsea Gaffey, Department of Youth Services, providing training on Ohio's Response to Human Trafficking in the Juvenile Justice System.

Trauma Responsive Care for Survivors of Trafficking

1.5 hours, 1.5 CEUs

Designed to support substitute caregivers, this presentation provides an overview of human trafficking, discusses common circumstances of human trafficking among youth involved in the child protection system, outlines state resources available to child-serving professionals, and provides information on how out-of-home care providers can care for youth using a trauma-responsive approach.

Establishing Safe Harbor Diversion Programs and Multidisciplinary Teams

1.5 hours, 1.5 CEUs

This training equips the audience to develop a court-wide response to human trafficking through the development of screening practices, implementation of Ohio's Safe Harbor law, and establishment of a multidisciplinary response.

Grant Outcomes

As a result of this OVC grant program, since October 2020:

242

Youth victims of trafficking identified and connected to supportive services that promote recovery and reduce vulnerability to further victimization.

2,949

Child-serving professionals trained to increase their capacity to recognize and support youth who have experienced trafficking and exploitation.

Training and Technical Assistance Focusing on Labor Trafficking

Throughout 2023-2024, the OCJS anti-trafficking team hosted a variety of trainings to build the capacity of our local nonprofits, state agencies, and other states developing their anti-trafficking response. Training is a critical component of Ohio's anti-trafficking response, as data frequently demonstrates when training is prioritized, victim identification and resource connection follows.

2023/2024 Training and Technical Assistance

In 2023 and 2024, the OCJS Anti-Trafficking Team facilitated training to 3,723 professionals and community parties. In addition to those detailed below, trainings were provided to the Cosmetology and Barbers Board, ODRC Adult Parole Authority, Unaccompanied Minors Council, the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, local school districts, and a variety of other organizations.

- In January 2024, former State Anti-Trafficking Coordinator Maria Busch, Judge Jodi Thomas, and Kim Flynn (a survivor leader and founder of a nonprofit focused on supporting survivors during re-entry from incarceration) provided training to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.



Anti-Trafficking Program Specialist Veronica Scherbauer presents anti-trafficking training.

- In January and April 2024, the OCJS child and youth anti-trafficking specialist partnered with Eyes Up Appalachia and subject matter expert Vanessa Perkins to provide training to Ohio START caseworkers, who work to support families impacted by substance use disorders who are involved in the child protective system.
- In March 2024, OCJS trained the U.S. Probation Office for the Southern District of Ohio on recognizing trafficking and facilitating survivor-centered intervention.
- In September 2024, The Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force hosted a webinar for Ohio providers to connect with the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) and the Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) to learn about updates to the NHTH procedures and discover how the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force will facilitate continued partnership between local providers and the NHTH.
- In October 2024, the state anti-trafficking director provided training to Ohio Homeland Security on Ohio's Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking and the importance of engaging law enforcement in a victim-centered response.



State Anti-Trafficking Director Kelli Cary presented at Ohio Homeland Security's fall conference for the Intelligence Liaison Officer (ILO) and Ohio Public Private Partnership (OP3) programs.

Training and Technical Assistance on Labor Trafficking

Both state and national data reflect a persistent gap between the identification rates of labor trafficking and sex trafficking, which is likely rooted partially in a lack of understanding regarding labor trafficking. To work toward closing this gap, the Task Force remains committed to prioritizing a specific focus on identifying and responding to labor trafficking in education efforts.

- In November 2023, former State Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Maria Busch collaborated with Advocating Opportunity and representatives from the FBI to train ODJFS Migrant Farmworker Outreach Specialists. This training provided introductory information on human trafficking as well as advanced information on labor trafficking dynamics and investigation.
- In October 2024, Special Population Anti-Trafficking Specialist Kathy Chen provided training at the National Labor Trafficking Conference and the North American Human Trafficking Conference in Las Vegas. Both trainings focused on the intersection of labor trafficking and sex trafficking, highlighting strategies for collaboration with law enforcement and victim service providers.
- As a part of the FY 2023 iteration of the Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking grant through the Office for Victims of Crime, the grant team focused on improving screening and response efforts to labor trafficking amongst child serving professionals. Detailed information on labor trafficking was shared in all training materials, including legal definitions, specific screening practices, characteristics and indicators of labor exploitation and trafficking,

legal aid options available to survivors, and discussions of labor trafficking in the context of forced criminality.

- o The grant team also developed an empathy building simulation training activity that models the experiences of a child who becomes a victim of labor trafficking through forced criminality, guiding the participants through navigating the systemic challenges that make a child more vulnerable to this form of human trafficking.
- o The three juvenile courts funded through this grant include screening questions specific to labor trafficking within their protocols and procedures, promoting equitable access to services for victims of labor trafficking.



Emily Dunlap, Advocating Opportunity presents on safe harbor laws and legal aid options available to survivors at the Ottawa County Identifying and Responding Training.

Capacity Building Resources


New tools were also developed in efforts to provide technical assistance to anti-trafficking stakeholders. These tools include:

- [**HTTF Community Assessment Tool**](#) – This tool was developed to aid local anti-trafficking coalitions and communities in assessing the strengths and opportunities for growth in their local anti-trafficking response.
- [**Updates to the Federal and State Human Trafficking Laws**](#) is a useful one-page summary of federal and state statutes related to trafficking.
- [**Protocol for Serving Child Victims of Trafficking in Ohio**](#) – This toolkit was created in partnership with the Ohio Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Commission Victim Services Committee. The resource is designed to equip Ohio’s communities with tools to support a coordinated response to sex and/or labor trafficking of youth, highlighting a series of preferred practices to assist communities in creating collaborative, survivor-centered interventions.

Increasing Access to Emergency Shelter

Because housing continues to be a gap in Ohio’s coordinated response, dedicated funding was prioritized to increase access to emergency shelter for survivors throughout the state. OCJS awarded \$1.8 million to the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN), which allowed 34 domestic violence shelters to increase program access for human trafficking survivors. Through this partnership, survivors have received more emergency and transitional shelter, new case management services have been established, and new partnerships were formed to prioritize collaboration between domestic violence and anti-trafficking organizations.

Prior to this funding, domestic violence shelters were often used to meet the need for emergency housing for survivors of trafficking and exploitation; however, many shelters lacked capacity to serve all victims of human trafficking, often due to lack of funding or lack of expertise in supporting this



population. This strategic funding partnership not only increases the number of shelter staff dedicated to supporting survivors and building local anti-trafficking programs, but it also ensures shelters receive training and technical assistance from subject matter experts at ODVN as they work to implement these services. In addition to funding, ODVN receives monthly programmatic support from OCJS.

Training and Technical Assistance

Staff at ODVN, in partnership with subject-matter experts from across the state, provided training and technical assistance to the member agencies receiving funding. These trainings occur on a monthly basis and include topics of interest to the shelter programs such as familial trafficking, substance use and human trafficking, serving those with co-occurring disorders, and the fundamental principles of domestic violence shelters as they relate to serving trafficking victims. ODVN also provided ongoing technical assistance to their sub-grantees during regular in-person and virtual site visits.

Program Impact

Since January 2024, the 33 funded shelters have reported identifying and serving a total of **322 survivors of human trafficking**. Programs provided, on average, 60 survivors of human trafficking with ongoing services each month including shelter, case management, advocacy, legal services, community referrals, housing support, relocation, crisis intervention, counseling, and interpreter services. Funded programs also connected an average of 16 survivors of human trafficking each month to peer support services, totaling 1,293 hours of peer support throughout 2024. Peer support is a key component of survivor-centered programming, facilitating a non-judgmental, supportive environment where recovery strategies are shared, and authentic connections grow.

Increasing Access to Mental Health and Detox Services

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OMHAS) continues to serve as a resource for individuals affected by human trafficking and in need of mental health and detox services across the state. Through the Crisis Continuum Network and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, survivors of human trafficking can access immediate support when experiencing a crisis related to substance use or mental health. To support a trauma-responsive solution to survivors who contact the Lifeline, the State Anti-Trafficking Director provided training and technical assistance to 988 staff on connecting callers who have experienced trafficking to the most appropriate crisis and mental health resources.

Additionally, OMHAS established a partnership with the Ohio Domestic Violence Network, providing information to shelter staff on helping residents access and navigate critical OMHAS resources. In 2025, OMHAS and ODVN will increase technical assistance efforts to facilitate more cohesive care for survivors in shelter seeking crisis support.

Combating Trafficking in the Illicit Massage Industry

One of the new initiatives supported by state funding in 2023 and 2024 includes an effort to combat human trafficking in the illicit massage industry throughout Ohio through the provision of specialized field support and investigative resources. Currently, law enforcement and subject-matter experts

conservatively estimate about 200 illicit massage businesses operating at any given time in rural, suburban, and urban areas of Ohio. An intelligence-driven counter-human trafficking organization, The Network, estimates 15,000 Illicit Massage Businesses are currently operating in the United States.

In 2024, some 15 law enforcement agencies received field support from the OCJS special population anti-trafficking specialist. This support included operation planning, training on cultural competency, victim support, linguistic services, and assistance with post-operation evidence analysis. As a result of this OCJS partnership with local human trafficking law enforcement task forces, 20 illicit massage businesses have been shut down and investigated since January 2024.



Special Population Anti-Trafficking Specialist Kathy Chen explains the Anti-Human Trafficking Field Support Program to combat the illicit massage industry at a meeting of the Ohio Collaborative Community-Police Advisory Board.

This initiative would not be successful without collaboration between OCJS, the Ohio Department of Taxation, the State Medical Board of Ohio, and the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Each of these task force agencies play a critical role in investigating cases and ensuring victims receive support.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol's Intelligence Unit provides 24/7 support to internal and external law enforcement with real-time analytical assistance and long-term support. Several analysts are specifically trained to assist in human trafficking investigations.

- In 2024, the intelligence unit responded to 337 requests for assistance related to human trafficking.
- This increased from July 2021-July 2022, when the Intelligence Unit responded to approximately 130 requests for assistance related to human trafficking investigations, demonstrating the efficacy of funding more analysts and providing more intensive anti-trafficking training and technical assistance.
- In 2024, the Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force trained other states including Colorado, Michigan, and Nevada on our collaborative field support model to disrupt human trafficking in the illicit massage industry.

Mandatory Training for State Employees

In 2023 and 2024, the Ohio State Highway Patrol and anti-trafficking program specialist provided virtual human trafficking trainings for state employees who work as juvenile justice and adult corrections professionals, first responders, inspectors, investigators, or those who perform duties of law enforcement officers. These trainings fulfill the requirement set forth in State of Ohio Administrative Policy HR-41, which requires certain state employees to complete three hours of live instruction on human trafficking. In 2024, the training policy was updated to reflect the current needs of state

employees, changing the required training time from three hours to two hours. In 2023 and 2024, some 205 state employees completed the training on how to identify and respond to human trafficking.

Continuing Education for Licensees of State Boards and Commissions

In 2015, the Governor’s Human Trafficking Task Force created a free, online 50-minute human trafficking course that is accepted by state boards, agencies, and commissions as a Continuing Education Unit (CEU). This training was updated in 2024, and the following table includes the number of licensees and other professionals who completed the training in 2023 and 2024. [This training](#) is available to the general public and any agency that would like to learn more about human trafficking and Ohio’s response.

State Board, Agency, or Commission	2023	2024
Ohio Department of Commerce	850	1,034
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction	588	1,348
Ohio School for the Blind	294	198
Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities	158	308
Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Development	45	449
Ohio Department of Public Safety	218	318
Ohio Board of Pharmacy	6	78
Other	557	1,606
Total	2,716	5,339

2025-2026 Human Trafficking Task Force Priorities



PREVENTION

1. Continue to improve screening protocols and assessments within state agencies to support survivor connection and response protocols

Agencies: Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC), Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OMHAS), Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS), Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY), Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS)

2. Recommend survivor-informed policy reforms related to juvenile justice, the child protection system, and prevention education

Agencies: All

3. Provide training and technical assistance to state and local partners, with a focus on labor trafficking and improving access to benefits

Agencies: Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS), Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (JFS), Ohio Department of Medicaid, Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY), Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS)



PROTECTION

4. Continue to partner with domestic and intimate partner violence programs to provide a continuum of housing solutions for survivors of human trafficking

Agencies: Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS)

5. Partner with state agencies, child-serving organizations, and substitute care providers to support a continuum of housing solutions for youth survivors of trafficking

Agencies: Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS), Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY), Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS)

6. Improve the capacity of the child protection system to identify and respond to human trafficking

Agencies: Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY), Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS)



PROSECUTION

7. Continue to provide law enforcement with culturally competent field support to investigate human trafficking occurring in illicit massage businesses and connect survivors to community-based support

Agencies: Ohio State Medical Board, Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS), Ohio Department of Taxation

8. Provide training to prosecutors to increase the number of successfully prosecuted human trafficking cases throughout the state

Agencies: Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS)

Appendix A: 2023-2024 Scorecard



PREVENTION

Priority	Accomplishments	Status
Centralize the state's human trafficking data onto the InnovateOhio Platform	The Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, in partnership with InnovateOhio, created a centralized human trafficking dashboard to increase data accessibility for the public, policy makers, and researchers. The Human Trafficking Data Dashboard was published on Jan. 21, 2025.	✓
Provide labor trafficking training to state and local partners	As a part of the FY 2023 iteration of the Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking grant through the Office for Victims of Crime, the grant team focused on improving, identifying, and responding to labor trafficking amongst child serving professionals. The Ohio Department of Medicaid and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services partnered with anti-trafficking providers to increase access to benefits for foreign national survivors.	✓
Connect school districts with human trafficking awareness and prevention curricula	The Ohio Department of Public Safety and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce partnered to update required anti-trafficking training materials and develop a training video for educators and school staff on identifying and responding to human trafficking. Resources can be found on the OCJS website and shared externally.	✓



PROTECTION

Priority	Accomplishments	Status
Partner with domestic violence programs to provide emergency shelter to human trafficking victims	OCJS awarded funding to the Ohio Domestic Violence Network to provide 33 grants to domestic violence shelters to serve human trafficking survivors. Training was also provided to better equip shelters as they serve survivors of human trafficking.	✓
Assist families and therapeutic foster parents to enable less restrictive housing solutions for trafficked minors	<p>This priority requires investing in direct service organizations to provide care to youth survivors while simultaneously equipping caregivers.</p> <p>OCJS provided funding and programmatic support to child serving organizations through the Direct Services for Victims of Human Trafficking Grant Program.</p> <p>OCJS established a strategic partnership with Gracehaven, funding the expansion of its community-based care and education program to Montgomery and surrounding counties.</p>	✓
Leverage crisis continuum infrastructure to increase access to detox and mental health services for victims of human trafficking	Through the Crisis Continuum Network and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, survivors of human trafficking can access immediate crisis support. Training was prioritized to ensure service providers are equipped to facilitate access to these crisis and mental health resources. OMHAS also began partnering with the Ohio Domestic Violence Network with the goal of connecting domestic violence shelters to critical resources.	✓



PROSECUTION

Priority	Accomplishments	Status
Connect law enforcement with culturally competent field support to address illicit massage industry cases	The special population anti-trafficking specialist was hired in January of 2024 to provide field support to law enforcement. Governor's Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force members (DPS, Ohio State Medical Board of Ohio, Ohio Dept. of Taxation) built a collaborative model that supports law enforcement from operation planning through prosecution.	✓
Leverage OSHP to provide intelligence and investigative resources to local, state, and federal law enforcement	Two intel analysts were funded in January 2024 that increased OSHP's capacity to support local law enforcement, human trafficking task forces, and ultimately assist with more investigations of human trafficking in Ohio.	✓