

June 9, 2016

House Introduces New Legislation on Health Care and Human Trafficking

Today, Representatives Steve Cohen, Adam Kinzinger, Tony Cárdenas, and Ann Wagner introduced the House version of the SOAR to Health and Wellness Act. This bill, which has also been introduced in the Senate by Senators Heidi Heitkamp and Susan Collins, would help ensure that trafficking victims receive the health care and services they desperately need by strengthening training for health care professionals.

[You can take action now to help us pass this legislation.](#)

Why do we need it?

Healthcare professionals are uniquely positioned to be able to interact with trafficking victims. One [study](#) found that “as many as 68 percent of people who are trafficked end up in a clinic, an ER or the doctor's office at some point while being exploited.” Another [study](#) specifically analyzing health consequences of sex trafficking found that 88% of the sex trafficking survivors surveyed reported having contact with a health care provider while being trafficked. The most frequent treatment site referenced in this study was a hospital/emergency room.

The reality is many victims of both sex and labor trafficking may have only limited contact with the public. The healthcare sector is one of the fields with the highest exposure to trafficking victims. As a result, it is absolutely critical that medical professionals are adequately trained to recognize trafficking victims and respond appropriately.

What does it do?

The SOAR to Health and Wellness Act will ensure that healthcare professionals are adequately trained to identify and support victims of human trafficking—so that victims receive health care and other services that are tailored to their needs.

The legislation extends the important work of a pilot program created by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure that healthcare professionals get comprehensive training to help trafficking victims. HHS's current program specifically targets healthcare providers, social workers, public health professionals, and behavioral health professionals to get comprehensive training to help trafficking victims. This legislation directs HHS to continue and expand on current training to enable healthcare providers to identify trafficking victims, provide informed and appropriate victim care, and implement proper protocols and procedures for working with law enforcement and service providers.

Additionally, this bill requires HHS to engage key stakeholders, including victims, on developing the training. It also encourages HHS to consider the possibility of integrating the training with existing education programs for domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.

Polaris is grateful to the leadership of Representatives Cohen, Kinzinger, Cárdenas, and Wagner for championing this bill. The SOAR to Health and Wellness Act helps to bridge a critical gap in the fight against modern slavery. Given the high potential that a trafficking victim will come into contact with a healthcare professional at some point, we must ensure that medical personnel are given the proper tools and training to help trafficking victims.