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# A Year Later, Authorities Struggle to Help Victims of Human Trafficking

**Victims themselves are often too fearful to cooperate, a government investigation found.**

By [Jee-Eun Lee](#) | Contributor **June 28, 2016**, at 5:36 p.m.



Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), who sponsored the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, speaks to reporters Tuesday on Capitol Hill. (Mark Wilson/Getty Images)

A little more than a year after Congress passed a law to crack down on human trafficking in the U.S. and help victims, authorities are struggling to identify human trafficking cases, services for victims are limited and the victims themselves aren't always willing to cooperate, a government investigator told a Senate committee Tuesday.

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, sponsored Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, was signed into law on May 29, 2015. It, authorizes state and federal programs to prosecute human trafficking as well as to support and provide restitution to victims of trafficking.

According to the nonprofit National Human Trafficking Resource Center, more than 21,000 cases of human trafficking have occurred in the U.S. since 2008.

Gretta Goodwin of the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, told the Senate Judiciary Committee that a May 2016 report by her agency found that the lack of victim cooperation is a huge hurdle in fully implementing the law.

"Victims' cooperation can be difficult," said Goodwin. "Part of the reason is because the victims fear talking to the police officer and to the law enforcement official. But they also fear the retaliation of traffickers."

The Justice Department and other federal agencies working to prosecute human trafficking crimes are focusing on providing training and technical assistance for law enforcement officials, including judges, prosecutors and investigators, according to Jill Steinberg, national coordinator for child exploitation prevention and interdiction at the Justice Department.

She said the agency has implemented all of the programs outlined in the 2015 law except for a requirement that Justice put information and resources on its website.

Cornyn said the Domestic Trafficking Victims' Fund mandated by the law was created, but is underfunded. Though \$31 million was expected to be raised from \$5,000 fines levied on offenders, Steinberg says the total raised so far is just about \$102,000. But she noted that the long investigations usually required in human trafficking cases means there have not been many convictions in the past year and that the fund likely will increase over time.