

# Northeast Ohio hotels train to spot human trafficking

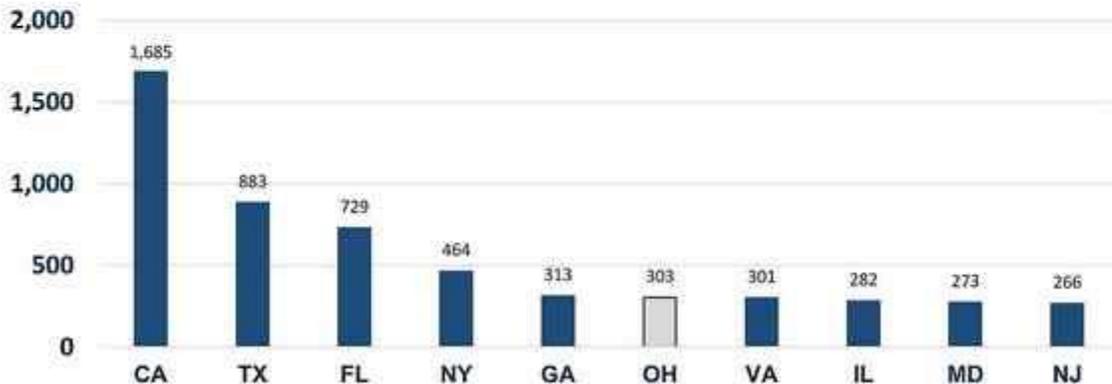


## CRIME BULLETIN FEBRUARY 2016



### HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS

Top Ten States in the Number of Potential Human Trafficking Cases Reported to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline, 2013-2014<sup>1</sup>



From 2013-2014 the National Human Trafficking Resource Center received calls from Ohio regarding 303 potential human trafficking cases (out of 9,927 total cases reported). This gives Ohio the sixth highest total for potential cases reported among the states. Ohio Highway Patrol

By [Kristi Garabrandt](#), The News-Herald

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Human trafficking is a daily occurrence right here in our own back yard, experts say.

Add a large convention, such as the [Republican National Convention](#), coming to Cleveland and the number of victims in Northeast Ohio could increase.

Numerous studies indicate that hotels are a primary venue for human trafficking activity, especially when a major sporting event, convention or activity is going on.

“Whenever there are large groups of people, the potential for trafficking easily increases,” said Karen Walsh, director for the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking. “I would want to make

clear that, unfortunately, this is a crime occurring 365 days a year, so we need to pay attention to it today during an event that would bring more people into town as well as after those people leave town.”

Northeast Ohio is an area that hosts a lot of major events, with one of the biggest being the Republican National Convention in Cleveland starting July 18.

The Collaborative to End Human Trafficking, established in 2007, has been taking a two-prong approach to educating the public, Walsh said. The first is education of professionals, educators and law enforcement, along with those who work in the hospitality industry.

The second is bringing these groups to a common table where information can be shared, and they can work together to help each other in identifying the red flags of trafficking.

One of the main groups that the collaborative has been working with is the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association, which represents all hotels and lodgings in Ohio.

“We have numerous hotels in training that we did as recently as a couple weeks ago with the collaborative,” said Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association Executive Director Joe Savarise. “We have worked with hotels in Lake, Geauga and Ashtabula counties.”

“It’s important for all of our members to be involved in these efforts, because all hotels can be venues for this type of activity.” Savarise said.

The hotels are undergoing training at all levels, from management to front desk personnel to security, and a trainer for each site will provide continuous education and training to new employees.

“We are recognizing the Republican National Convention is an opportunity for this to happen, but it won’t be the end of our efforts,” Savarise said.

One of the main goals between the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking and the Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association is to form a channel of communication between hotel employees and law enforcement.

“By creating personal connections between the hotels, law enforcement and social service agencies, we are making ourselves available anytime day or night to help,” Savarise said.

Hotel employees are being trained to look for suspicious activities, such as a person checking into the hotel with several minor children wanting to stay three or four nights, not having any luggage, and wanting to pay in cash, Walsh said. One by itself may not mean anything, but multiple signs together could be indicative of something wrong.

Another sign, Walsh said, is someone who seems to be under the control of another person, unable to make eye contact or answer questions for themselves or they don’t have any identification.

Human trafficking is no longer a crime that any one group can handle on its own, Walsh said. Law enforcement have so much to deal with now, from just traffic to terrorism, they need others to be aware and be the eyes and ears.

If a person sees any such red flags or suspects a person maybe a victim or human trafficking, Walsh advises under no circumstances to try to intervene. Call 911 or a local law enforcement agency, or call the national hot line for human trafficking at 888-3737-888 or the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center STAR Program at 855-431-STAR (7827).

“Human trafficking is a big problem, but it’s nice to see there are people dedicated to tackling it head on and our industry is going to be a major part of that,” Savarise said.

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