

<http://www.postandcourier.com/20160503/160509802/sc-supreme-court-orders-family-circuit-judges-to-attend-human-trafficking-summit>

S.C. Supreme Court orders family, circuit judges to attend human trafficking summit



[Cynthia Roldan](#)

May 3 2016 9:41 am



S.C. Supreme Court justices ordered family and circuit judges to attend a human trafficking summit. Gavin Jackson/Staff

[×](#)

COLUMBIA — S.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Costa Pleicones has ordered all family and circuit judges to attend a human trafficking summit to address “the most pervasive evil facing the world today,” he said.

The order, which Pleicones stressed was [routine](#), highlights the state’s increased effort to tackle an issue of growing concern in South Carolina.

“It’s to inform and help develop strategies to help combat the evil of human trafficking,” Pleicones said of the summit, which is scheduled for August.

“It’s not always apparent that cases before them may involve human trafficking,” he added. “That’s sometimes not apparent on the surface of things.”

Attorney General Alan Wilson also has been working on bringing attention to the issue for several years. In 2014, he rolled out a plan to combat the issue.

“It’s imperative that those on the front lines of this battle — such as prosecutors and law enforcement — are adequately equipped to identify and address suspected human trafficking cases,” said Hayley Thrift, Wilson’s spokeswoman, in a written statement that followed the court’s announcement. “This is a great opportunity to streamline our efforts alongside the Office of Court Administration to reach a larger audience, which will hopefully yield recognition of more cases and assistance to more victims throughout South Carolina.”

In 2011, the Polaris Project, a national organization that fights global human trafficking, ranked South Carolina as No. 6 of the “Dirty Dozen” states for having weak trafficking laws. Since then, the General Assembly has passed legislation to strengthen the state’s criminal code, while also giving the state grand jury jurisdiction over such cases. In October, two Greenville residents were the first to be sentenced under the shift, getting 12 years in prison on a charge of trafficking.

Wilson’s office will be working with the Supreme Court for the summit. Only family and circuit judges are being ordered to attend. Circuit solicitors, prosecutors, public defenders and representatives from the State Law Enforcement Division, as well as those from a half-dozen other state agencies, are being invited but not ordered to be there.

Laura Hudson, of the S.C. Crime Victims’ Council, and one of the state’s staunchest victim advocates, praised the effort. “I think most people are not aware of the human trafficking issue and the extent of it on our coast,” Hudson said. “Judges can’t keep up with everything. They need to be constantly educated on the issues.”

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center reports that since 2007, there have been 1,182 total calls about human trafficking in South Carolina, with more than 850 potential victims. Sex trafficking and labor trafficking are the most common violations investigated, although there is often a reluctance by alleged victims to come forward or assist law enforcement.