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County Executive creates fund to assist human trafficking victims, strengthen police efforts

August 28, 2015



County Executive Allan Kittleman

(Jon Sham/Baltimore Sun Media Group)

By [Andrew Michaels](#) Howard County Times [contact the reporter](#)

Assets seized through the arrest of criminals involved with human trafficking will be used to create the fund.

Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman signed an executive order Friday morning to create a fund assisting victims of human trafficking and reinforce the police department's efforts to crack down on the crime.



Assets seized through the arrest of criminals involved with human trafficking will be used to create the fund.



[Howard group advocates against human trafficking](#)

"This criminal activity, which occurs throughout the state and country, must be confronted aggressively," Kittleman said in a statement. "We will not sit by and allow individuals to be exploited for profit by these callous criminals. Because this illegal activity is hidden and driven underground, it's easy to think it doesn't occur in Howard County. But we know from working with our Police Department that it does exist here, and the impact on victims is devastating."

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The fund to assist victims and law enforcement will work similarly to the drug assets forfeiture account, where assets seized through illegal drug activity are used for substance abuse prevention and education as well as police enforcement and training. Assets directed to the new fund will be divided, with half going to a nonprofit agency providing direct support services to victims and the other half funding law enforcement efforts, such as surveillance equipment, staff training and overtime salary expenses for officers involved with round-the-clock investigations.

Creating such a fund was one of the recommendations presented by the Human Trafficking Task Force created by the county council last year. The task force's report, released Dec. 1, contains 20 recommendations in four categories.

"Any additional resources we receive to crack down on this horrific criminal activity will be put to good use to provide necessary support to victims through a collaborative approach with victim services and human rights advocates," Howard County Police Chief Gary Gardner said.

In addition to creating the designated funds, Kittleman also announced three other immediate steps to curtail human trafficking in the county, including:

- Adding a second full-time undercover police officer to work exclusively on human trafficking investigations.
- Requesting the county's local delegation to the general assembly to pass enabling legislation to allow county police officers to investigate massage parlors and other businesses suspected of being fronts for illegal prostitution and human trafficking.

- Convening a meeting on Sept. 2 for Human Rights Administrator Reverend Dr. Barbara Sands to review recommendations with task force members to determine the next priorities.

The police department estimates that up to \$25,000 will be seized annually, in both cash and the sale of property, from criminals profiting from human trafficking.

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