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## Herring launches online ad campaign to fight human trafficking



An example of the targeted online ads that will be used in Attorney General Mark R. Herring's campaign to raise awareness of human trafficking in Virginia.

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By GRAHAM MOOMAW Richmond Times-Dispatch

An online ad campaign will target websites in the “darker corners of the Internet” and mobile devices being used at rest areas as part of Virginia’s ongoing campaign to fight sex trafficking and forced labor, Attorney General Mark R. Herring announced Monday.

The multilingual ad campaign will use geolocation technology to target mobile phones being used within a quarter-mile of rest areas on major highways. The digital push builds on the anti-trafficking awareness campaign Herring launched one year ago, which thus far has focused on highway billboards and mirror stickers in rest-stop bathrooms.

With trafficking activity moving online, Herring said, the state is “taking the fight to the traffickers” using analytics and data-driven ads.

“Rather than targeting the general public with our message, we are targeting those who are actually involved in human trafficking: the traffickers, their victims and those who would exploit them,” Herring said in a news conference at the Capitol.

The ads, produced by Richmond marketing firm Madison + Main, will appear in English, Spanish, Korean and Vietnamese and encourage people to call or text an anti-trafficking hotline.

Herring would not name specific websites on which the ads will appear.

“We know that traffickers use the Internet to advertise and try to find people who would pay for services,” Herring said.

During a two-week trial run for the online ads, visits by Virginia users to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center website increased 35 percent, officials said. The ads will run for at least six months.

Through Sept. 30, there were 112 reported cases of human trafficking in Virginia in 2015, the ninth most in the United States, according to calls received by the national resource center. Virginia had the fifth most cases in 2014.

Roughly 80 percent of the reported cases this year involved women, according to Herring’s office, most of whom were not U.S. citizens.

Del. Jennifer L. McClellan, D-Richmond, who has pressed for anti-trafficking legislation in the General Assembly, also spoke at Monday’s news conference.

“We’re starting to educate the public on the unique nature of this crime,” McClellan said. “How to recognize it. How to stop it. How to help the victims get help and how to not criminalize the victims.”

Herring’s office said the awareness campaign has been paid for by a combination of federal grant funding administered by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and asset forfeiture money controlled by the attorney general’s office.

The first phase of the campaign cost about \$58,000, Herring’s office said. The online component is estimated to cost \$64,000.

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