

HEMAD: Nonprofit seeks 60,000 men to help end human trafficking

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MILWAUKEE (Nov.23, 2020) – A small faith-based nonprofit community service organization hopes to raise an army of at least 60,000 men before the end of the year to oppose human trafficking and the commercial sex trade. The campaign received the backing of leaders from law enforcement, state and local politicians, religious institutions and business leaders during an online news conference today.

“We are facing an epidemic in our state and our nation that most people don’t realize exists, even though it’s out in the open,” said State Rep. Jason Fields. “It’s human trafficking involving the commercial sex trade – a multimillion-dollar criminal enterprise that exists in cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas – and that is victimizing vulnerable teen boys and girls in every community.”

Fields, who has introduced or supported a number of bills aimed at helping human trafficking victims escape the commercial sex trade, led the kickoff of the HEMAD (Human trafficking Educators working with Men and boys to stand Against the Demand) campaign. HEMAD asks men to take a public stand against human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of adults and children.

The campaign will run five weeks – lasting until Dec. 28. Organizers hope 60,000 men will take the HEMAD pledge this year. Last year, the goal was 6,000 men – twice the number from 2018. Thanks to social media, the campaign went viral with more than 45,000 men in 11 states and two foreign countries taking the pledge.

HEMAD is a program of Convergence Resource Center (CRC), a faith-based nonprofit community service organization helping women rebuild their lives after trauma with an emphasis on justice involved women and female survivors of human trafficking.

“The statistics are staggering,” said Acting Chief Michael Brunson Sr. of the Milwaukee Police Department.

“Eighty percent of human trafficking cases in the U.S. involve sex trafficking, and this is a crime being committed in every county in our state. One in three runaways will be lured into sexual exploitation within 48 hours of leaving home and the average age of entry into the commercial sex trade is 13 – that is a kid in the seventh grade!”

“In 2019, more than half of the criminal human trafficking cases in the U.S. were sex trafficking cases involving children,” said Chief Deputy Denita Ball of the Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Office. Ball served 25 years in the Milwaukee Police Department, including time in the Sensitive Crimes Section that deals with sex crimes. She said that while law enforcement agencies are working together and sharing information, they need the public’s help.

“Traffickers are using social media platforms to recruit and advertise,” she said. “The average trafficker has five victims who see an average of 30 “clients” a day – seven days a week. We need more citizens to get involved. If you see something, say something and call police. You might save a life.”

“We will not tolerate these horrific actions in our community and we’re going to fight harder than ever to turn these numbers around and save these children and young adults,” said Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett.

He added that the city is working with CRC, the Milwaukee Joint Human Trafficking Task Force and other groups to fight human trafficking.

During the online event, Fields showed a brief video illustrating the issue of human trafficking and how men can play a key role in ending the demand of sex trafficking. He then led the dozens of leaders in a pledge to stand up against traffickers.

“HEMAD is doing important work in building awareness of the signs of human trafficking,” said Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul in a statement.

“Wisconsinites can help combat this terrible crime by standing up and pledging to take action against it.”

A study on sex trafficking of juveniles and young adults by the Medical College of Wisconsin found that 55 percent were under age 18 when they were first trafficked

for sex and one in four had been trafficked multiple times. The study recommends additional training for street-level police officers to better distinguish between prostitution and sex trafficking of adults, focusing awareness and prevention efforts toward individuals at risk for sex trafficking victimization, identifying and addressing the factors that enable sex trafficking to occur in certain areas and developing ways to identify locations where juveniles are trafficked through collaboration between the community, the criminal justice system, local healthcare systems, and social service and advocacy agencies.

“About 300,00 children are at risk of being sex trafficked each year in the U.S.,” noted Fields. “That’s the combined populations of Kenosha, Racine, Waukesha and Wauwatosa or Green Bay, Eau Claire, Sheboygan, Oak Creek, Mequon and Germantown. That’s a lot of kids and they are worth saving!”

Fields added that nearly 45,000,000 cases of human trafficking have been reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888 or text 233733) in the past five years and the number of human trafficking cases in the U.S. is rising every year.

“This is a multimillion-dollar demand-driven industry that we need to put out of business. We can squash that demand by publicly taking a stand,” said Fields. “I challenge my fellow community leaders in the state assembly, the state senate, county commissions and city councils, school boards, civic organizations, churches and block watch groups to take the HEMAD pledge and share it with their constituents.”