

Convergence Resource Center: Nonprofit seeks 75,000 men to help end human trafficking

Posted on Monday, Nov 22, 2021

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MILWAUKEE (Nov.22, 2021) – Against the backdrop of several high-profile federal trials, state and community leaders today called on men to take a stand against human trafficking and the commercial sex trade. The goal is to enlist at least 75,000 men to join the cause.

One of the best ways to make change happen is by educating our friends and neighbors. By raising awareness, we inspire one person to stand up, and then another and another. It's like dominoes," said Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes. "Men need to play a responsible role in this issue. We can't absolve ourselves of responsibility with trafficking because, in reality, human trafficking is perpetuated by men, mostly."

During an online news conference, members from law enforcement, state and local governments, religious institutions and the business community gave their backing for the fourth annual HEMAD campaign.

HEMAD (**H**uman trafficking **E**ducators working with **M**en and boys to stand **A**gainst the **D**emand) asks men to take a public stand against human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of adults and children. In its first year (2018), 3,000 men to the HEMAD pledge. In 2019, the goal was 6,000 men but the result was more than 40,000 thanks to social media. Last year, nearly 60,000 men in 11 states and two foreign countries took 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.

“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 Arnold Cifax, Youth Pastor of New Testament Church in Milwaukee and a board member of CRC. “Human trafficking is a multimillion-dollar criminal enterprise that exists in cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas – and that is victimizing the most vulnerable adults, teens and children in every community.”

The statistics are staggering,” said Tamara Remington, a security specialist for Acuity Insurance. Remington spent 24 years as a police officer in California and Wisconsin prior to joining Acuity. As a detective with the Sheboygan Police Department, she investigated scores of human trafficking cases resulting in federal and state charges.

“In 2019, the last year that figures are available, more than half of the criminal human trafficking cases in the U.S. were sex trafficking cases involving children. 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,” said Remington. “Law enforcement agencies are working together and sharing information, but they need the public’s help. Traffickers are using social media platforms to recruit unknowing victims and advertise. We need more citizens to get involved. If you see something, say something and call police. You might save a life.”

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

“It’s important for every woman to hear every man take this pledge,” said Desirae Casarez of Oshkosh. Casarez has worked at CRC for the past seven years and has seen the trauma human trafficking survivors have experienced as well as their resiliency in rebuilding their lives and being able to trust other people.

In a video, Milwaukee Common Council President Cavalier Johnson said a two-year study by the city’s homicide review commission suggests the area’s sex trafficking problems could be much larger than suspected. He added that the city’s Office of Violence Prevention and the Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence are

working with CRC and other groups to reduce the demand and eliminate opportunities for human trafficking.

“I encourage all elected officials at the local and state level to join me by taking the HEMAD pledge to stand against human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of adults and children,” Johnson said.

“Together, we can reduce the demand for sex trafficking in our communities and decrease the chances that a young person from our church or school becomes a victim of this dehumanizing underworld.”

According to the U.S. State Department’s [Trafficking in People Report](#), 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.

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 300,000 children are at risk of being sex trafficked each year in the U.S.,” noted Cifax. “That’s the combined populations of Racine, Eau Claire, Oshkosh, LaCrosse and Manitowoc or Green Bay, Janesville, Sheboygan, Wausau, Fitchburg and Brookfield. That’s a lot of kids and they are worth saving!”

Cifax added that more than 50,000 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.

“It is important for men in business and civic organizations, churches and block watch groups to take the HEMAD pledge and share it with their friends, coworkers and neighbors,” said Cifax. “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.”