

HEMAD campaign: Region's leaders take a stand against human trafficking

Posted on Tuesday, Nov 22, 2022

>> **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.](#)**

MADISON, Wis. (Nov.21, 2022) – State and local government leaders, law enforcement and business leaders announced a united front in actively opposing a growing industry from expanding in the region and across the state.

“Usually, when MadREP and community leaders hold a news conference, it’s to announce a new business or industry we are bringing to the area. But today, we are focused on a business we want to eliminate – human trafficking – a modern form of slavery,” said Jason Fields, President and CEO of the Madison Regional Economic Partnership (MadREP).

“Today, we’re announcing a project where people – not government agencies – can take the lead and stop this crime from happening in their neighborhoods and communities,” said Fields. “The HEMAD campaign is a movement spreading across Wisconsin and the nation. Our goal is to get 75,000 to join us by the end of the year.”

HEMAD (Human trafficking Educators working with Men and boys to stand Against the Demand) asks men to take a public stand against human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of adults and children. 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. It is part of the Anti-Trafficking Consortium and opened an office in Madison this summer.

“Human trafficking is a multimillion-dollar criminal enterprise that victimizes the

most vulnerable adults, teens and children in every community – from cities and suburbs to small towns and rural areas,” said Arnold Cifax, an Associate Pastor of New Testament Church in Milwaukee and board vice chair of CRC.

Cifax said nearly 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. 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. Last year, [federal prosecutors in Wisconsin](#) opened seven new cases for human trafficking and won 12 cases involving 14 defendants.

“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 Kenosha, Stevens Point, West Bend, Wauwatosa, Waukesha and Watertown or Green Bay, Janesville, Sun Prairie, Beloit, Fitchburg, and Middleton. That’s a lot of kids and they are worth saving!”

During the event, Cifax 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.

“It’s important for every woman to hear every man take this pledge,” said Dr. Debbie Lassiter, CRC’s CEO and co-founder. For nearly 20 years she 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, the executive director of Los Angeles-based nonprofit [Saving Innocence](#) said the problem and solution lies with men. Saving Innocence works with law enforcement and child welfare agencies to help children escape and overcome trauma from sex trafficking.

“Most of the buyers are men. Most of the sellers and traffickers are men. Even if we’re not doing this, it’s happening and we’re allowing it to happen. It’s on us to take a stand and say “no more – not on my watch!”” said Alan Smyth of Saving Innocence.” Take that pledge, bring as many men as you can into it, and let’s end this thing once and for all!”

This is the fifth annual HEMAD campaign and the first in-person kickoff in three years because of the Coronavirus pandemic. Despite the past two years’ campaigns

being virtual, the movement has grown. In its first year (2018), 3,000 men took the HEMAD pledge. In 2019, the goal was 6,000 men but the result was more than 40,000 thanks to social media. Nearly 60,000 men in 11 states and two foreign countries took the pledge in each of the past two years.

“Between now and the end of the year, we want men to go to the HEMAD page on the Convergence Resource Center website (<https://www.convergenceresource.org/hemad>) and register, watch the short video and take the pledge,” said Cifax. “You can do this during a TV timeout of a football game or in between shows. And then share the link on social media. Our goal is to have 75,000 men take the pledge this year so we can squash the demand for this.”

“We know what the problem is – it’s men. And we know what the solution is – it’s strong men stepping up,” added Smyth. “There are survivors out there who need someone to fight for them. It’s on us.”