

U.S. House of Representatives
Homeland Security Committee

Task Force on Enhancing Security
for
Special Events in the United States

A Scourge Against Humanity: Addressing Human Trafficking at Mass Gatherings

December 17, 2025

Testimony of:

Yasmin Vafa, Executive Director
Rights4Girls
Washington, DC

Thank you, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and Members of the Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events in the United States, for inviting me to speak at this important hearing on human trafficking at mass gatherings.

My name is Yasmin Vafa and I am the Executive Director of Rights4Girls, a national organization dedicated to ending violence against vulnerable young women and girls in the United States. We work alongside survivors to strengthen state and federal laws, advance research, provide training to judges and systems professionals, and conduct public awareness campaigns to dismantle the conditions that enable exploitation. Our mission is simple: to ensure every girl can grow up safe and free from violence.

This hearing could not be more timely. Over the next several years, the United States will host some of the world's largest sporting events—including the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and the 2031 FIFA Women's World Cup. These events bring complex security challenges, and among them, the humanitarian crisis of human trafficking must be a chief concern.

Trafficking Is Already Here—and Happens with Impunity

Sex trafficking is not a distant threat that appears only during major events. It exists today in every community across this country—rural, suburban, tribal, and urban. Vulnerable people, primarily women and children, are bought and sold for profit and pleasure, often with near total impunity. A recent *New York Times* investigation exposed the brutal reality on Los Angeles's Figueroa Street, where child sex trafficking persists openly.¹

Girls like **Ana**, who was first trafficked on Figueroa at age 13 alongside her 11-year-old sister. Today, at 19—missing her front teeth and living with an ostomy bag—she is still forced to meet a \$1,200 daily quota or face violent punishment at the hands of her exploiter.² Her story reflects the trauma endured by countless women and girls in the sex trade.

The data is stark:

- **Over 90%** of women in the sex trade report being shot, raped, strangled, or beaten—often at the hands of sex buyers.³
- They face a **mortality rate 200 times higher** than the general population.⁴
- **68%** suffer PTSD at levels comparable to combat veterans.⁵

These harms predate and outlast any special event. But when you add the mass influx of tourists, temporary anonymity, and large numbers of men with disposable income, the risk of trafficking and exploitation intensifies dramatically.

Major Events Create a Temporary Market Where Trafficking Thrives

Events like the World Cup, Olympics, March Madness, or the Super Bowl create a perfect storm: increased hotel bookings, short-term rentals, rideshares, and festivities—along with a surge in the commercial sex market. While sex buying happens daily across America, major events concentrate the demand, making exploitation easier and more profitable.

History bears this out:

- During one **Final Four weekend** in Minneapolis, law enforcement arrested **47 men** for felony solicitation of a minor, **11 for trafficking or promoting prostitution**, and recovered **28 trafficking victims**, including a child.⁶
- During an **MLB All-Star Game** in Cleveland, **49 people** were arrested, including **28 men seeking sex with children**.⁷
- Before **Super Bowl LIII** in Atlanta, **26 traffickers** and **34 men attempting to buy sex with children** were arrested, and multiple child victims were recovered.⁸
- In Phoenix in 2023, police made roughly **50 felony arrests** tied to trafficking during **Super Bowl LVI**.⁹

The pattern is unmistakable: **where demand spikes, traffickers follow.**

Addressing the Real Driver: Demand

Recognizing the clear link between sex buying and exploitation, Rights4Girls launched our **Sex Buying Isn't a Game** national billboard campaign in eight states hosting the NCAA March Madness games and MLB All-Star Game. The campaign exposes the often invisible role of sex buyers in fueling sex trafficking and seeks to disrupt demand. During the 2025 NCAA Final Four in San Antonio—while our campaign was running—**eight trafficking victims were recovered**,¹⁰ underscoring the need for proactive awareness and deterrence—and illustrating what can be accomplished when NGOs, the media, and law enforcement come together.

We must remember: the sex trade is a **multi-billion-dollar industry funded entirely by sex buyers**. Without buyers, there is no business. Our recent report, **Buyers Unmasked**, analyzed hundreds of posts from online hobby boards—essentially Yelp pages for prostitution—and reveals a culture of dehumanization, indifference, and entitlement that traffickers rely on.¹¹

One survivor told us she spent **six months at age 16** trying to tell her buyers she was being trafficked against her will. **Not one buyer helped her**. Every man prioritized his own protection or the money he had already paid.

This is the norm—not the exception.

As one buyer in our report openly stated, the goal is:

“Find them, f* them, forget them. This is the gold standard for men's spiritual health.”¹²

This mindset is the invisible engine of trafficking at mass gatherings.

Policy Must Focus on the Source of the Harm

If we are serious about preventing trafficking during major events—and year-round—our policies must address the true driver of this harm: the demand created by sex buyers.

To that end, we recommend:

1. Target the Demand

Prioritize deterrence operations focused on sex buyers during large events as a form of trafficking and violence prevention. To ensure the prevention of sex trafficking year-round, we must mandate that all federally-funded programs to reduce human trafficking include demand reduction tactics. We have seen the success of these approaches in other jurisdictions across the U.S. and the globe.

2. Support Survivors

Ensure that recovered victims are never criminalized and are immediately connected to comprehensive, trauma-informed services, whether they be children or adults. We must remember that many of the adults in the sex trade today, are the child sex trafficking victims of yesterday who have merely come of age in this industry and are in need of the same services and support.

3. Promote Accountability

Pass and enforce laws that hold all exploiters accountable, both sex buyers and traffickers—using buyer fines to fund survivor services, mandating buyer accountability programs that shift mindsets and culture, and enhancing penalties against those driving the sex trafficking market. It is crucial to hold all exploiters accountable for the devastating harm they inflict on victims and our communities.

Just this year, Rights4Girls worked with survivors and partners to pass laws in states like California¹³ and New Hampshire¹⁴ increasing penalties on buyers and generating funding for survivors. The models exist. What we need now is the political will to implement them.

A Call to Action

When the stadium lights dim and fans pour into the streets, no woman, no child, and no member of the surrounding community should be treated as entertainment or collateral damage.

These global events present an opportunity—not only to protect potential victims, but to expose the reality of sex-buying and the role it plays in fueling this multi-billion-dollar industry. Our report, **Buyers Unmasked**, lays bare the attitudes and actions of sex buyers in their own words. Their statements shatter the false narrative that buying sex is a victimless act. What emerges instead is a pattern of misogyny, dehumanization, and deliberate disregard for signs of coercion, vulnerability, and desperation.

The evidence is clear. The solutions are known. What remains is our courage to act.

Thank you for your attention and your commitment to protecting the most vulnerable among us.

¹ *Can Anyone Rescue the Trafficked Girls of L.A.'s Figueroa Street?*, N.Y. Times (Oct. 26, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/26/magazine/sex-trafficking-girls-la-figueroa.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Jody Raphael and Katie Feifer, “Get the Facts: What We Know about Sex Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution in the United States,” (World Without Exploitation, January 2020), <https://www.equalitymodelus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Get-the-FactsJanuary-2020.pdf>.

⁴ John J. Potterat et al., “Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women,” *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 159, no. 8 (April 15, 2004): 778–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwh110>.

⁵ Melissa Farley et al., “Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2, no. 3–4 (2004): 33–74, https://doi.org/10.1300/J189v02n03_03.

⁶ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *Twin Cities-area child sex trafficking sting nets 47 arrests during ‘Final Four’ weekend* (Apr. 10, 2019), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/twin-cities-area-child-sex-trafficking-sting-nets-47-arrests-during-final-four>.

⁷ Associated Press, *Authorities: 49 arrests on sex counts during All-Star week* (Jul. 11, 2019), <https://apnews.com/general-news-a41d30bce6c149a1abfde006224853fb>.

⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigations, *FBI announces results of human trafficking operation for Super Bowl LIII* (Feb. 5, 2019), <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/atlanta/news/press-releases/fbi-announces-results-of-human-trafficking-operation-for-sbliii>.

⁹ AZ Central, *Sex trafficking sting operation in Arizona during Super Bowl leads to multiple arrests* (Feb. 26, 2023), <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2023/02/26/multiple-arrests-made-in-sex-trafficking-sting-during-super-bowl/69942519007/>.

¹⁰ Associated Press, *Human Trafficking in San Antonio During Final Four a Real Problem, Officials Say*, KENS 5 (Apr. 6, 2018), <https://www.kens5.com/article/news/crime/final-four-human-trafficking-san-antonio-arrests/273-6f774742-f1e6-4856-83cf-3d2becb7bff4>.

¹¹ Rights4Girls, *Buyers Unmasked: Exposing the Men Who Buy Sex & Solutions to End Exploitation* (Jan. 2025), <https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Buyers-Unmasked-02122025.pdf>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ California AB 379, <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB379/id/3263490>.

¹⁴ New Hampshire SB 267, <https://legiscan.com/NH/text/SB267/id/3159427>.



NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

JONATHAN F. THOMPSON
Executive Director and CEO

December 17, 2025

Testimony of Jonathan F. Thompson before the U.S. House Homeland Security Committee, Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss proactive measures to safeguard mass events across the United States. As the nation prepares to host unprecedented gatherings over the next three years — including 2026 FIFA World Cup matches, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and an expanding national calendar of large music festivals — our security posture must evolve to anticipate and counter emerging threats.

My testimony focuses on five areas: (1) drug-facilitated crime and public safety, (2) biometric and facial recognition systems, (3) digital anti-human trafficking tools, (4) drone and counter-UAS operations, and (5) specialized training for local law enforcement and event personnel.

I. Drug-Facilitated Crime and Public Safety Risks

Mass gatherings create ideal environments for exploitation through drug misuse, particularly substances such as ketamine, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), and emerging synthetic analogs, which can be colorless, tasteless, and fast-acting. These characteristics make them tools for sexual assault and robbery in dense, high-energy venues where early symptoms are difficult to distinguish from intoxication or fatigue.

At events like international soccer matches, Olympic celebrations, and festivals such as Coachella, Lollapalooza, and Electric Daisy Carnival, crowd dynamics can delay detection and reporting. To mitigate these risks, event security planning should incorporate:

- Field testing kits and portable spectrometers at checkpoints and backstage areas to detect ketamine, GHB, and similar agents in drinks or on surfaces.
- Public education campaigns, including signage and mobile alerts, warning about drink-spiking risks and directing attendees to on-site medical and reporting stations.
- Interdisciplinary response teams where medical personnel and law enforcement are trained together to recognize symptoms, preserve evidence, and support survivors.

These actions would shorten response times and improve case outcomes for drug-facilitated assaults at large events.

II. Advancing Facial Recognition and Biometric Systems

Upcoming FIFA matches, the Los Angeles Olympics, and large-scale fan zones will draw millions of spectators, dignitaries, and workers into dense urban areas, making identity management and perimeter control paramount. Facial recognition and AI-enabled video analytics can help identify persons of interest, detect restricted-area breaches, and verify credentials, but deployment must be consistent with constitutional protections and privacy safeguards.

Policy recommendations include:

- Creating and maintaining a DHS-approved list of biometric systems that meet accuracy, demographic fairness, and cybersecurity standards suitable for dynamic mass-event environments.
- Ensuring secure, role-based integration of facial recognition alerts with DHS fusion centers and FBI databases, limited to specific, event-related objectives.
- Mandating strict data minimization, including short, predefined retention windows and independent audit logs, so data are deleted after the operational need ends.

These measures would enhance situational awareness at stadiums and fan zones while preserving public trust.

III. Digital Anti-Human Trafficking Tools

International events and large music festivals can increase vulnerability to sex and labor trafficking, as traffickers exploit transient workforces, informal lodging, and large anonymous crowds. Federal campaigns and task forces already provide training and awareness tools to help law enforcement and first responders recognize trafficking indicators and respond appropriately, and similar approaches can be embedded into mass-event planning.

Key strategies are:

- Deploying AI-driven tools to analyze online advertising, payment patterns, and communications that may indicate trafficking activity in host cities before and during events.
- Installing multilingual digital kiosks and secure mobile portals at venues, transportation hubs, and fan zones so victims or witnesses can seek help anonymously and be quickly connected with trained responders.
- Enhancing secure data-sharing and evidence management among federal agencies and local task forces, using modern, auditable systems that protect privacy while maintaining chain of custody.

Applying these tools to World Cup host cities, Olympic venues, and festival locations would strengthen efforts to identify victims and disrupt trafficking networks linked to large events.

IV. Drone Security and Counter-UAS Operations

Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) have become integral for aerial broadcasting, crowd monitoring, and logistics, but unauthorized drones pose risks ranging from airborne hazards to hostile surveillance and potential weaponization. Security planners for the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympics are already emphasizing the need to expand counter-UAS authority and capabilities for state and local partners under federal oversight.

To address this threat, Congress and DHS should:

- Support use of flexible temporary flight restrictions and geo-fenced airspace around stadiums, fan festivals, and training facilities, coordinated with the FAA and local authorities.

- Invest in layered detection systems combining radio-frequency sensing, radar, and optical tracking to distinguish authorized broadcast or safety drones from unauthorized incursions.
 - Expand counter-UAS training and technical assistance for qualified state and local law enforcement, under a federal legal framework that protects lawful aviation and communications systems.
- These steps will help prevent malicious or careless drone activity from disrupting high-profile matches, ceremonies, and outdoor concerts.

V. Strengthening Local Training and Coordination

Technology alone cannot secure mass events without trained personnel who can interpret data and act quickly. Security preparations for the World Cup and Olympics already involve close coordination among federal agencies, state agencies, and local police, highlighting the importance of sustained training, exercises, and clear roles.

Recommended actions include:

- Developing a national “Mass Event Security and Response” curriculum through the Department of Homeland Security that covers drug-facilitated crimes, biometrics, counter-UAS operations, and human trafficking, with modules tailored to stadiums, fan festivals, and music events.
- Aligning federal grant guidance so states and localities can prioritize funding for technology integration, multi-agency exercises, and specialized training connected to upcoming FIFA matches, Olympic events, and major festivals.
- Requiring standardized after-action reports for federally supported events, capturing threat incidents, technology performance, interagency coordination successes, and lessons learned in a central repository.

Institutionalizing this knowledge will improve readiness not just for one tournament or festival season, but for all future large-scale events.

Conclusion

The United States is entering a period of exceptional global visibility as it prepares for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, and a sustained boom in large music festivals and other mass gatherings. These events showcase national strengths and community spirit, but they also present attractive targets for those who would exploit crowds, technologies, and complex logistics. By integrating advanced detection of drugs like ketamine and GHB, responsible use of facial recognition, modern digital anti-trafficking tools, robust counter-drone

capabilities, and comprehensive training for local law enforcement and event staff, the nation can significantly reduce risk while preserving the openness and celebration that define these occasions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership on this critical set of issues.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Thompson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jonathan F. Thompson
Executive Director/CEO
National Sheriffs' Association



Written Testimony of Eliza McCoy
Vice President, Programs and Impact
American Hotel and Lodging Association Foundation

Submitted to the
U.S. House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee
Task Force on Special Events Security

December 17, 2025

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and distinguished members of the Task Force. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the lodging industry's efforts to prevent human trafficking as we prepare for major events that will draw millions of visitors to the United States. My name is Eliza McCoy, and I serve as Vice President of Programs and Impact at the American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation (AHLAF). In this role, I lead AHLA's human trafficking awareness and prevention initiatives.

Prior to joining AHLA, I served for over 15 years in law enforcement and nonprofit leadership focused on child safety and anti-trafficking programs. As an investigator in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, and later leading outreach, training, and prevention efforts at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, I have seen how criminals exploit victims and the lives they shatter, and I have devoted my career to helping victims overcome their trauma. I have the privilege of working for the hotel industry where preventing human trafficking is a core value and a collective effort across the industry.

It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss how the hotel and lodging sector is proactively preventing human trafficking and collaborating with government partners, industry leaders, law enforcement, victims' rights organizations, and survivors of trafficking to secure our communities ahead of the 2026 World Cup, the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the Paralympics and the America 250 celebrations.

AHLA and the AHLA Foundation

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) is the unified voice of America's hotels, representing every segment of the lodging sector, from family-owned inns and franchises to iconic global brands and real estate investment trusts. The AHLA Foundation is the national charitable affiliate of AHLA, dedicated to advancing the lodging industry's role as a force for good in communities across the country. I am proud to share with you that there is no cause more universally embraced by our member companies than anti-human trafficking efforts. The AHLA Foundation is the national leader in the hotel industry's efforts against human trafficking, working to equip every property and every employee with the training, tools, and support needed to identify and prevent this heinous crime. AHLAF drives the industry's commitment to safety, security, and responsibility through its flagship No Room for Trafficking (NRFT) initiative, survivor support funding, and a wide network of public- and private-sector partnerships.

In addition to this critical prevention work, the Foundation advances the economic and social well-being of the lodging workforce through career development programs, research, education, and community investment. Guided by strong collaboration across hotel brands, ownership groups, service providers, and government agencies, the Foundation creates pathways to meaningful careers, builds safer hospitality environments, and reinforces the industry's role as a trusted partner in every community it serves.

AHLA Foundation's "No Room for Trafficking" Initiative

In 2019, the AHLA Foundation, in partnership with our member companies, dedicated leaders, law enforcement partners, and expert organizations, launched the "No Room for Trafficking" (NRFT) initiative as a comprehensive, industry-wide program to train hotel employees to identify the signs

of trafficking and to report activity to the proper authorities.¹ No Room for Trafficking sends a loud and clear message: we do not tolerate trafficking in hotels.² The national program unites the entire hotel sector behind shared goals and standards. NRFT's mission is to (1) elevate the issue of human trafficking and industry efforts to prevent it; (2) educate industry employers and employees to identify and report suspected trafficking in hotels and communities nationwide, and; (3) empower survivors with the support they need to thrive.³

Critically, AHLAF provides members with free, practical tools including: accessible training for employers and employees, model anti-trafficking policies, indicator signage, and a comprehensive Member Resource Guide detailing how to implement training, establish reporting protocols, and connect with law enforcement and victim service providers.⁴ We also formed strategic partnerships with leading anti-trafficking and child protection groups including ECPAT-USA (now PACT), Polaris, and Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) to ensure our materials reflect best practices and to coordinate our industry training with broader national efforts. Additionally, the Foundation has worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security's Blue Campaign, which has identified hospitality as a critical frontline sector for Trafficking detection.⁵ Over many years, we have collaborated with DHS to promote the Blue Campaign's Hospitality Toolkit, including multilingual posters, indicator cards, and response protocols tailored for hotels, and we proudly participate in DHS's annual #WearBlueDay awareness initiative each January during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.⁶

These partnerships underscore that our industry's approach is holistic and aligned with federal efforts: every level of our organizations, from corporate headquarters to front-desk staff, is engaged in recognizing the signs of trafficking and responding in concert with law enforcement.

Training and Impact

A cornerstone of No Room for Trafficking is a free, comprehensive and tailored training program available to all hotel employees, developed in collaboration with Marriott International and PACT. The flagship course, "Your Role in Preventing Human Trafficking: Recognize the Signs," can be taken online or delivered in-person and is designed to integrate seamlessly into hotel training systems. To maximize accessibility, it is offered in dozens of languages and formats, ensuring that employees at every property, from luxury resorts to roadside motels, can receive this critical education.

Since 2020, this training, provided at no cost to any hotel associate or interested party, has been completed more than 2.5 million times, an unprecedented scale of reach made possible by industry-

¹ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking* (NRFT), AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/nrft/>.

² PACT, *Hotel Industry Unites on New Campaign to Fight Human Trafficking* (June 26, 2019), PACT, <https://www.wearepact.org/blog/2019/6/26/hotel-industry-unites-on-new-campaign-to-fight-human-trafficking>.

³ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking* (NRFT), AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/nrft/>.

⁴ PACT, *Recognize the Signs* (training course), PACT, <https://courses.wearepact.org/recognize-the-signs>.

⁵ American Hotel & Lodging Association, *Human Trafficking Prevention Partners*, AHLA, <https://www.ahla.com/news/human-trafficking-prevention-partners>.

⁶ AHLA Foundation, *AHLA & AHLA Foundation Honor National Human Trafficking Prevention Month; Announce Major Survivor Fund Donation*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/ahla-ahla-foundation-honor-national-human-trafficking-prevention-month-announce-major-survivor-fund-donation>.

wide commitment and unwavering support. Each of those completions means another set of eyes and ears on the ground, better equipped to identify potential trafficking and act swiftly.

One powerful example of the impact of employee awareness occurred at a hotel in Los Angeles. A young woman in a lobby bathroom told the hotel's staff she was being held against her will. Trained employees immediately assessed the circumstances and recalled the indicators they had learned through the No Room for Trafficking program. They acted decisively and helped a victim when she needed it most.

To ensure training translates into action, the NRFT initiative also emphasizes ongoing awareness and continuous improvement. AHLA distributes "back-of-house" signage, discreet posters for employee-only areas, that list common trafficking indicators and the hotline number to report suspected trafficking.⁷ Hotels display these in break rooms and housekeeping closets as daily reminders that staff are on the front lines to help save lives.

Each year, AHLAF hosts an NRFT Summit, which convenes hotel executives, security directors, operations leaders, survivors, law enforcement leaders, and experts to share best practices and emerging trends.⁸ These meetings, alongside year-round webinars and regional events, create a platform for continuous learning to enhance our industry's awareness and protocols. Our message, reinforced from the boardroom to the break room, is that every hotel employee can help in the fight against trafficking, and together we are making our hotels inhospitable to traffickers, while protecting guests, employees, and local communities.

The NRFT Survivor Fund

In addition to prevention efforts, the lodging industry also invests considerably in support for those who have survived this terrible crime. We know that identifying a victim in a hotel is only the first step; true success means that person can escape their trafficker and rebuild their life with dignity. That is why in 2022, the AHLA Foundation expanded its efforts by establishing the No Room For Trafficking Survivor Fund, an industry-wide program devoted to supporting human trafficking survivors through leading community-based organizations nationwide.⁹ In my role at the AHLA Foundation, I have the privilege of administering this fund, which provides grants that deliver long-term support and economic empowerment for survivors. The NRFT Survivor Fund was launched with contributions from major hotel companies and has quickly grown into a multi-million-dollar resource. There is no greater moral cause for hoteliers than preventing human trafficking and supporting its victims, and I am proud of the impact we are having on the lives of these incredible people.

Since the inception of the fund, we have distributed millions of dollars in grants to various organizations which provide direct resources to help survivors move from crisis towards stability, from safe housing and childcare, to counseling, job readiness, and preparation for sustainable

⁷ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking Member Resource Guide*, AHLA Foundation (PDF), <https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/NRFT-%20Member%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>.

⁸ AHLA Foundation, *No Room for Trafficking Summit 2025*, AHLA Foundation, <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/event/no-room-for-trafficking-summit-2025>.

⁹ American Hotel & Lodging Association, *AHLA Statement on Human Trafficking Awareness Training and Recognition Act*, AHLA, <https://www.ahla.com/news/ahla-statement-human-trafficking-awareness-training-recognition-act>.

employment. These are tangible outcomes that change lives. The grants have helped to support more than 3,200 survivors in 18 states across the country. Some of those individuals are now employed in hospitality, starting new careers in a trauma-informed environment. The Survivor Fund has created an unprecedented platform for collaboration in support of survivors. We are not only training our own employees to spot trafficking; we are investing in the long-term wellbeing of survivors, helping them find stability and employment, including in our sector. This holistic approach, combining prevention with survivor support, is how the lodging industry is striving to break the cycle of trafficking.

Trafficking Risks During Major Events and Industry Preparation

The United States is set to host the FIFA World Cup, the nation's semiquincentennial celebration, America 250, and the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles over the next couple of years. These events will showcase the best of America. However, as this Task Force recognizes, they also pose unique security challenges, and human trafficking is among the threats that demand our vigilance. Sporting events and mass gatherings can attract illicit business, including commercial sex trafficking.¹⁰ Traffickers are opportunistic: they seek to capitalize on the surge of travelers and the relative anonymity of crowded venues and hotels.¹¹ However, while major events often draw attention to human trafficking, focusing solely on a single day obscures the fact that this is a year-round problem. The same traffickers active during big sporting events continue their crimes long after the games end. Large events, including the World Cup and Olympics, tend to spark heightened concern and law enforcement action, but trafficking is not necessarily driven by these events, it simply becomes more visible.¹²

The heightened focus on trafficking during large events must be channeled into effective, lasting solutions rather than short-term alarm. Polaris, which operated the National Human Trafficking Hotline for the past 18 years, emphasizes that portraying a single event as “the largest trafficking incident” can be misleading, the reality is that trafficking is a 365-day-a-year problem that exists in *every* city and *every* state, before, during, and after the event.¹³ Major events are a critical opportunity to strengthen our long-term antitrafficking infrastructure. They can also leverage the intense public attention to drive sustainable improvements, better data collection on trafficking, enhanced coordination among agencies, and addressing underlying vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit.¹⁴

The hotel industry is embracing this approach. Well in advance of many major events, AHLA and our partners work to ensure heightened readiness on the ground, while integrating anti-trafficking planning into the broader security strategy. Over the past several years, AHLAF has engaged with event committees and NGOs. We have teamed up with major brands and leading international organizations for several past Super Bowls to ensure property-level teams are trained and ready in

¹⁰ Polaris, *The Super Bowl Myth* (Feb. 2016), Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2016/02/the-super-bowl-myth/>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Sebastien Malo, *Is the Super Bowl Really the U.S.'s Biggest Sex Trafficking Magnet?*, Reuters (Feb. 1, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/is-the-super-bowl-really-the-uss-biggest-sex-trafficking-magnet-idUSKBN1FL6A0/>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Polaris, *World Cup 2026: An Opportunity to Lead on Human Trafficking* (June 2022), Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2022/06/world-cup-2026-an-opportunity-to-lead-on-human-trafficking/>.

advance of these events.¹⁵ The initiatives have brought together hoteliers, local law enforcement, and survivor advocates to raise awareness and distribute educational materials to prepare the host city.

Similarly, over the last 18 months, we have worked with state and local governments and law enforcement agencies to implement mandatory human trafficking training laws. Currently, more than a dozen states mandate hotel employees receive human trafficking awareness training, and we are working with others to offer our collaboration, technical assistance and industry-wide networks to support the ongoing planning for 2026 World Cup cities and the LA28 Olympics.

Several of our member companies are also active participants in global efforts, including serving the FIFA Human Rights Advisory Council, reinforcing the industry's long-standing commitment to prevention and victim protection. AHLA is proudly working directly with the intergovernmental World Cup Task Force to ensure federal stakeholders are aware of, and able to utilize, existing hotel-industry training and resources, and we remain ready to support coordinated, industry-wide collaboration with local agencies in each host city.

Hotels are also taking proactive steps to help prevent human trafficking and support victims. In addition to mandatory training for staff, our members provide emergency housing for victims, donate space for proactive law enforcement operations, and actively engage with local governments and service providers to strengthen response efforts. Many hotel companies also implement enhanced measures during high-risk periods, including refresher trainings and pre-event briefings, increased security presence, stricter guest-verification protocols, coordination with local police task forces and the FBI, and widespread dissemination of the National Human Trafficking Hotline across employee and public areas. These combined actions reflect the industry's commitment to safeguarding guests, employees, and communities year-round, not only during marquee events.

The lodging industry is fully committed to working hand-in-hand with this Task Force, DHS, DOJ, local law enforcement, and NGOs so that these milestone events are remembered for sportsmanship and national unity. We see the upcoming years as a crucial opportunity to demonstrate U.S. leadership in combating trafficking on a global stage.

Challenges and Recommendations

The hospitality industry plays a frontline role in preventing and detecting human trafficking, yet several operational and structural challenges persist. Training and vigilance vary significantly across alternative lodging types, which often lack the same safeguards and expectations placed on traditional hotels. Even when warning signs are identified, response pathways are not always clear, as many properties lack streamlined coordination with law enforcement and survivor-support organizations. This gap can delay responses, create confusion, and limit aid. Similarly, communities frequently lack year-round survivor support infrastructure such as safe housing and

¹⁵ AHLA Foundation, *AHLA & AHLA Foundation Honor National Human Trafficking Prevention Month; Announce Major Survivor Fund Donation*, AHLA Foundation (last visited Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.ahlafoundation.org/ahla-ahla-foundation-honor-national-human-trafficking-prevention-month-announce-major-survivor-fund-donation/>

specialized investigative teams, creating vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit long after a major event ends.

To address these challenges, we recommend adopting consistent, industry-wide standards for training and anti-trafficking policies across all lodging providers, ensuring no weak links in prevention efforts. Hotels should be supported with a clear and streamlined reporting process that effectively leverages the resources of both law enforcement and survivor advocacy organizations. Finally, long-term capacity building, including investment in emergency housing and specialized law enforcement units, will strengthen community readiness throughout the year, not only during high-profile events. With these improvements in place, the lodging industry can remain a strong and reliable partner in preventing trafficking, protecting victims, and supporting prosecution of offenders before exploitation takes root.

Conclusion

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Pou, and members of the Task Force, thank you for the opportunity to share my perspectives on human trafficking prevention with you today. The American hotel industry is fully committed to setting the national standard in the effort to stop human trafficking. I am proud to represent an industry that is confronting this difficult issue head-on with resolve and compassion. As we approach the World Cup, America 250, and the Olympics, we continue to stand united with law enforcement, survivor support organizations, and policymakers to ensure these memorable events are not exploited by those who would prey on the vulnerable. Hotels are a key part of the solution to protect our guests, our employees, and our communities. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF COURTNEY LITVAK
DIRECTOR OF SURVIVOR INITIATIVES : NO TRAFFICKING ZONE, INC (NTZ)
Survivor Leader, Current Member of Department of Homeland Security Blue Campaign Survivor
Consultant Network, Former Member of the United States Advisory Council to Combat Human
Trafficking, Sex Trafficking Specialist, Advocate, Community Awareness Activist and National
Speaker and Educator.

House Committee of Homeland Security Task Force on Enhancing Security for Special Events
in the United States
A Scourge Against Humanity: Addressing Human Trafficking at Mass Gatherings Hearing
December 17, 2025.

Dear Chairman McCaul, and Members of the Task Force:

Thank you to the Members of this critical Task Force and to Chairman Michael McCaul. I am honored to be here today to testify about the Scourge Against Humanity: Addressing Human Trafficking at Mass Gatherings. I am representing No Trafficking Zone, Inc (NTZ) and all the victims and survivors just like me. I pray my testimony will help you understand how and why money, power, control and lack of truth of this sophisticated crime are imposing destruction and brokenness throughout our nation. The annual global profits from forced labour and forced sexual exploitation have risen to over an estimated \$236 billion. Today, I will highlight the devastating effects human trafficking has on its millions of victims and their families, as well as the human heart and soul. I also want to focus on the contributing factors, indicators, and intersections of increased human trafficking during mass gatherings and special events including but not limited to: FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, and the Olympics.

NTZ is a non-partisan, non-profit whose mission is to prevent, combat, and eradicate human trafficking by creating no trafficking zones throughout the world. This takes survivor-led solutions, unity, mobilization, trauma informed training, collaboration, intelligence gathering and dissemination, legislation, and victim centered education.

No Trafficking Zone dismantles human trafficking by breaking it down into identifiable markets, building and informing operational models and task forces that implement tangible, real-world solutions.

One of those major markets sits at the intersection of sports, entertainment, and sex and labor trafficking.

NRG Park's Commitment to Preventing and Combatting Trafficking

In 2020, the NTZ Game Over Initiative was launched at NRG Park in Houston, Texas, the busiest stadium and sports and entertainment complex in America, hosting more than six million visitors annually.

NRG Park became the first certified No Trafficking Zone sports and entertainment venue in the world.

Today, NRG Park includes:

- Updated Survivor-led signage was recently unveiled throughout the venue in both English and Spanish
- NTZ first created and embedded a human trafficking response team and resources inside stadium operations including but not limited to: Houston Texan's home games, the NCAA Championships, and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.
- Active coordination with local, tribal, state, and federal law enforcement partners.
- Direct collaboration with NRG Park security teams during large events.

This NTZ Game Over Initiative model turns a stadium and massive event venue from a passive location into an active deterrence and response vs reactive environment to prevent and combat human trafficking in all its forms. NTZ is also training other states and sports stadiums to become No Trafficking Zones.

Alongside our National Survivor Led Sports Committee, No Trafficking Zone is honored to partner and work closely with our incredible impact partners such as: HIDTA, the Harris County Sheriff's Office, HSI, DEA, Child ID/ Amber Alerts, US Marshalls, and the FBI.

Building Task Forces and Coordinating with HIDTA

No Trafficking Zone does not operate in isolation. We help build and support multi-agency task forces that bring together local, state, and federal partners to dismantle organized crime and transnational networks.

NTZ serves as the Human Trafficking Coordinator for Houston HIDTA, a High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task force that integrates local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. This coordination allows trafficking to be targeted alongside drug trafficking, gang activity, and money laundering rather than in silos.

Through the Game Over Initiative, NTZ works directly with HIDTA intelligence analysts who track trafficking trends surrounding major games and events, and movement patterns. Earlier this month, our analysts tracked over 600+ live illicit sex advertisements during a local NFL game.

By merging HIDTA's intelligence capabilities with survivor-informed field operations and venue security, trafficking pipelines can be identified and disrupted in real time.

What the Data and Survivors Teach Us at Large Events and Sports–Sex and Labor Trafficking Intersection

National hotline data and law enforcement reporting consistently show increases in forced labor procurement and sex trafficking activity surrounding major sporting events and mass gatherings.

These factors include but are not limited to:

- Spikes in online sex advertisements timed to games, tournaments, and large events.
- Increased movement of victims through hotels, rideshares, parking infrastructure, and entertainment districts.
- Elevated risk for minors, particularly through online grooming and peer-on-peer recruitment including through social media.
- Construction projects and vendors for stadiums and event venues or infrastructure upgrades may involve migrant or temporary labor subject to coercion or exploitative conditions.

These patterns confirm what survivors and investigators know: sports and entertainment venues are a trafficking market that requires intentional intervention and oversight at all levels.

National and International Recognition

The NTZ Game Over Initiative has received national recognition, including an award this year from the NFL Alumni Association and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, bestowed to our unwavering and fearless CEO Jacquelyn Aluotto.

NTZ also serves on the FIFA Human Rights Committee in Houston, Texas, where we are actively training law enforcement and partners in preparation for FIFA events.

In addition, No Trafficking Zone has presented this stadium model to the White House and the Department of Homeland Security, where we were asked whether the model could be replicated nationally.

Survivor Leadership as a Public Safety Strategy

Survivor leadership is embedded into every NTZ model. Survivors understand grooming, coercion, recruitment, and movement patterns better than anyone else and that traditional security models often miss.

Survivors are not stories or just statistics. They are strategic experts whose insight strengthens prevention, identification, and response.

My Personal Testimony and Survivor Story

I myself went from being sex trafficked by a romeo and guerrilla pimp during the February 2017 Super Bowl in NRG Park's parking lot and surrounding hotels, to working with NTZ and the HCSO Task Force at NRG Park to combat the very crime that once ensnared me. I've had the privilege of working with the White House and Members of Congress, training and educating thousands across the country, and now sit before you today to put a face to this crime and remind you why we do what we do.

Victims of sex trafficking, including myself, come face to face with some of the darkest and most corrupt and demon-possessed individuals imaginable, violent offenders, buyers of the most vulnerable, including children, pedophiles, kidnappers, murderers, and psychopaths. In trafficking, you see the depth of evil and terror human beings are capable of inflicting on one another.

One heartbreaking incident I will never forget occurred just hours after I physically ran for my life following nearly three years of being trafficked. I was reunited with my family. As surreal as that moment was, I remember seeing my dad running toward me in the airport terminal, only for him to run right past me. He did not recognize his own daughter. I was so severely emaciated and badly injured that I was truly unrecognizable.

Less than two weeks later, I met one of the most remarkable leaders and fathers who had been searching for me and praying for my safe return home: Congressman Michael McCaul. I went from being one of his constituents to being groomed and sex trafficked from my high school in his district. I will never forget Congressman McCaul and my angel Larissa Plunto coming to check on me, sitting with me, talking with me, and listening to me for hours at my childhood church. He can attest to both my profound physical and psychological scars. But I was alive, and I was finally home.

I remember wondering if it was real, could I truly be here, telling the Congressman about what I had just escaped from after narrowly surviving? That is how immensely blessed I feel to be sitting before you today. I am blessed. I am a child of God. I am a miracle. I escaped. But so many others have not, or have lost their lives to this evil.

At times, the enemy tries to burden me with survivor's guilt, but God reminds me to look the devil in the face and declare: *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"* (Genesis 50:20). This truth reflects God's sovereignty and His ability to transform human evil and suffering into divine purpose. We must lead by example, as He does, through forgiveness, redemption, and hope.

Like many victims, my traffickers threatened my life countless times and threatened my family, especially if I ever left or told the truth about what they did to me and the other girls. They destroy lives and families and lead through intimidation and fear. My traffickers even told me they were my God, as many traffickers operate with a delusional savior complex. Contrary to what traffickers program victims to believe, it is only by grace through faith that we are saved (Ephesians 2:8–9). Salvation is God’s unconditional favor, love, and power, a gift that cannot be earned.

I thought I had accepted Jesus into my heart when I was younger, yet it was in the depths of true hell that God met me exactly where I was. My Heavenly Father was the only one who could reach me in my most sunken place. He was with me in the pit (With a Lion On A Snowy Day), teaching me to unlearn fear, face it, and run for my life, to reclaim my voice and my future.

I stand before you today not bearing the outward appearance of the horrors I endured. Because of the blood of Yeshua, I am reborn, no longer made in my traffickers’ image, but in His. This is the true nature of the battle we face if we hope to eradicate human trafficking in our nation and world. As Scripture reminds us: *“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power... For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces of evil”* (Ephesians 6:10–13).

Therefore, just as God saved and spoke to me, I urge you to put on the full armor of God. Do not be afraid. Victims need to know they are not alone. We all fall short of His glory, I know I do, but His grace and mercy are SUFFICIENT..

As echoed in my beloved favorite story, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, after anguish and captivity, the realization comes that God’s justice and vengeance is far greater than our own. In the end, the declaration is clear and I believe it with all of my heart and soul: **“God will give me justice.”**

Closing Remarks

Human trafficking at large and at mass gatherings and events is not inevitable, It is preventable and combatable.

When we treat sports and entertainment venues as trafficking markets, build and inform task forces, collaborate with federal law enforcement, integrate intelligence, and center survivor leadership, we move from awareness to action and from reaction to prevention.

Let us all work together and hold stakeholders accountable to the best of our abilities in order to make FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl, the Olympics and all mass gatherings- No Trafficking Zones!

Thank you for letting me share my heart with you all and for your leadership and your commitment to addressing what truly is a scourge against humanity.

God Bless.