

# NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino  
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## Supervisors draw attention to human trafficking plague

The Board of Supervisors today trained the spotlight on the tragedy of human trafficking, particularly the sexual exploitation of children, and measures the county is taking to protect victims and prosecute traffickers.

"As unbelievable as it seems in a civilized society, we are seeing growing numbers of adults and children exploited in every way by human traffickers. The District Attorney and the Board of Supervisors have made combating this issue a top priority," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Gary Ovitt.

The Board today voted unanimously to officially recognize January 11 as the National Day of Human Trafficking and outline measures the county is taking to provide services to victims, educate the public, and target offenders.

"Human trafficking is a growing problem that takes advantage of the young and vulnerable. We, as a society, need to take immediate steps to eliminate this scourge. I am proud to work with our partners in this very important project," said District Attorney Mike Ramos.

The San Bernardino County Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation was formed in March and quickly began working with law enforcement, prosecutors, service providers, and the public on how to intervene, educate, prevent, and suppress these crimes.

In San Bernardino County, the District Attorney's office has filed 91 child prostitution cases in Juvenile Court since January 2005. Nationally, 30 percent of the children housed in shelters and 70 percent of children living on the streets are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The average age of entry into prostitution is 12 to 14.

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"Although the coalition is in its early stages, services are being provided to minors and others who are being trafficked in our county, education is being provided to the public to prevent trafficking, and stiff penalties are being handed out to those who commit these crimes," Ovitt said.

CASE uses a two-pronged effort to arrest, imprison, fine, and seize questionable assets from those who prey on minors, and at the same time provide support to those minors through juvenile placement facilities, residential facilities placement, and other social services as well as providing training and education.

"It is important to ratchet up the attention of the plight of these children and crack down on the adult pimps who recruit, misuse and abuse them. That effort should include maximum prison time, fines, assets seizure or all three," Ovitt said.

In San Bernardino County, the CASE coalition is developing tailored services for victims.

"We are hopeful that through the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Innovation funding plan that \$800,000 annually over three years will be available to help meet the needs of victims identified in San Bernardino County," Ovitt said.

In addition, prevention efforts are ongoing and will be enhanced by the MHSA grant once it is approved by the state. Those efforts include enhanced public awareness and training of those who interact with the vulnerable population of domestic minor sex trafficking victims, including staff from law enforcement, District Attorney, Public Defender, Probation, Behavioral Health, Children and Family Services, Public Health, and community-based organizations.

Ovitt also called for the establishment of a national child sexual exploitation intelligence center modeled on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Washington, D.C.

"The problem isn't just ours here in California. It's a national problem," Ovitt said.