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Sunday, February 11, 2007

## Human trafficking legislation is pushed

Previous effort for bill fell short

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FRANKFORT, Ky. — Cases of human trafficking have begun to surface in Kentucky, and advocates argue that the state should join 27 others that have enacted laws against exploiting people for forced labor, domestic work or the sex trade.

"It is happening here," said Cori Hash, a legal aid lawyer in Lexington. "We've seen it. We know the victims are out there."

A bill filed by Sen. David Boswell, D-Owensboro, would make it a criminal offense to bring people into the state for exploitation.

The measure, Senate Bill 43, also would provide services and help for the victims of human trafficking, often women or children.

"I think this issue is very important -- it's a human rights issue," Boswell said.

A human-trafficking bill passed the Senate last year, but it died after the House attached an unrelated amendment dealing with identity theft.

Boswell said he's discussing the bill -- which has been assigned to the Judiciary Committee -- with Senate leadership and thinks its chances are better.

"This bill is getting some traction," he said.

Groups backing the bill include the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, the Kentucky Office of Legal Services and the Kentucky Domestic Violence Association.

The Rev. Patrick Delahanty, who is working on the bill for the Catholic Conference, said it's difficult to know how significant the problem is in Kentucky.

"These people are coerced, intimidated and forced to work," he said. "They are very fearful of coming forward."

Trafficking victims often come from other counties -- enticed by purported offers of jobs or marriage. Many are laborers or migrant workers, but some are U.S. citizens, often children, forced into prostitution, Hash said.

Congress passed a law banning human trafficking in 2000 to combat what the State Department has said is a growing problem in the United States. It says that as many as 800,000 people a year are trafficked worldwide,

with up to 17,500 of those coming to the United States, according to its 2005 Trafficking in Persons Report.

The Justice Department, which enforces the federal law, also is urging states to adopt their own laws, said Andrea Bertone, director of HumanTrafficking.org, a Washington resource and information center.

State laws provide more law enforcement resources to fight trafficking, as well as services for victims, Bertone said.

Indiana adopted a trafficking law last year, and Bertone said Kentucky should consider one as well.

"Victims of trafficking have been found in some pretty remote areas," Bertone said. "No state is immune to people at some point being exploited."

In Kentucky a handful of women believed to be victims of human trafficking have arrived at domestic violence shelters over the last few years, said Sherry Currens, director of the domestic violence association.

Domestic violence often is involved if the victim is forced to live with a male she thought she was coming to marry, Currens said. Some victims are forced into prostitution and have their passports and other documentation taken and freedom restricted, she said.

The victims, who may not speak English and may not be in the country legally, often are afraid to go to authorities. If they do get away, they may have nowhere to go, Currens said.

"I think it's a growing issue," she said. "There are homeless shelters, but in rural areas the services just aren't there.

Hash, who works at the Maxwell Street Legal Clinic in Lexington, specializes in immigration cases. She said she and other immigration lawyers have seen several cases where they believe human trafficking was involved.

In one case, a Western Kentucky family brought a foreign woman to live with them to work as a nanny and housekeeper. But when she arrived, they took her passport, restricted her to the house and made her work long hours for wages that amounted to less than \$1 an hour.

The woman was afraid to press charges, but legal aid lawyers were able to work with her to recover some of the wages she said she was owed, Hash said.

Hash said she also is working with a woman who said she was sold to a Southern Kentucky man as a wife. And her office is tracking child prostitution prosecutions in Tennessee and Ohio where evidence shows the prostitution rings operated in Kentucky.

"I expect the numbers are actually much higher than are coming through our doors," she said.

More information is available at [www.HumanTrafficking.org](http://www.HumanTrafficking.org).

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