

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Human trafficking and the girl next door

Human trafficking is a criminal offence which involves harboring, recruiting and transporting an individual for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation.

When someone thinks of 'human trafficking,' they may imagine crimes taking place outside of Ontario and involving individuals smuggling young men and women into Canada from outside the country. What we are learning is 90 per cent of the cases of human trafficking involve victims who are Canadian born.

Victims are predominantly girls with an average age of 14, but there have been cases involving girls as young as 10 years old. Traffickers strategically target high-risk populations: vulnerable and marginalized communities with poor socioeconomic conditions. However recent evidence has shown that this is an issue that crosses all socioeconomic boundaries, leaving thousands of young people vulnerable. Victims are systemically isolated from family and friends, and then psychologically and physically abused. According to the International Labour Office, 'Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation has been found to be the most common form of trafficking in Canada, with Ontario functioning as a major 'hub'.'

It is reported that Ontario is home to 65 per cent of the country's human trafficking cases. It is also known that Highway 401 is a noted 'corridor' for trafficking. We are finding out that human sex trafficking is becoming one of the fastest growing crimes throughout Ontario.

In order to fight this epidemic, it is important to recognize the signs that a young person may be at risk of being a victim of trafficking. The following are signs that may indicate that a young person could be at risk:

- ? You notice a change in your child's communication patterns and physical appearance.
- ? Your child will not allow you to access his or her technology.
- ? Your child has a second cell phone and/or multiple accounts on social media.
- ? Your child is exhibiting chronic runaway behavior.
- ? Your child has a new boyfriend ? particularly an older one.

At an individual level, being aware of these signs will allow for parents to be able to protect their children from traffickers. My colleague, MPP Laurie Scott, introduced Bill 17, Saving the Girl Next Door Act, 2016 to combat the growing issue of human trafficking at a provincial level. This bill would aid in protecting thousands of potential victims of human trafficking. Bill 17 would allow the courts to issue a protective order for victims older than 15 against a trafficker for a minimum of three years, allow survivors to sue a trafficker as a form of restitution, and expand the provincial sex offender registry to include human trafficking as a sex offence. The Liberal government has announced a strategy to combat human trafficking, however it does not commit to permanent, multi-year funding.

There are a variety of ways individuals can join the fight against human trafficking, such as volunteering with organizations like the Canadian Women's Foundation or the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking. Additionally, joining one of the Anti-Trafficking Committees at either of these organizations is another great way to get involved.

Together we can bring an end human trafficking in Ontario and save the girl next door.

