

Province introduces new legislation to combat human trafficking

By **ALYSSA PARKHILL**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Provincial Government has announced a new legislation to fight against human trafficking in Ontario.

Announced on National Human Trafficking Awareness Day on February 22, the Combatting Human Trafficking Act was introduced, which includes new legislation as well as amendments to the current Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy 2020-2025.

"Our government is taking deliberate steps to put an end to human trafficking and protect victims and potential victims of this terrible crime," said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. "This tough new legislation builds on our Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy we introduced nearly a year ago, giving law enforcement additional tools to help prevent and deter human trafficking."

Ontario reported more than half of human trafficking cases across Canada, with the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) being a major hub due to its easy access to all major highways and airport.

According to Statistics Canada, 45 per cent of reported victims in Canada are between the ages of 18 and 24, with 28 per cent under the age of 18 and 26 per cent older than 25 years old.

Police services across Canada reported 1,708 incidents of human trafficking beginning in 2009 to 2018. Additionally, Ontario reported 68 per cent of human trafficking police reports since 2009.

Premier Doug Ford stated in a press conference held on Monday that Ontario has seen the highest number of human trafficking reports across Canada in 2019.

"Our province has become a hub for human trafficking," he said. "We will not allow this to continue here in Ontario."

The five-year anti-human trafficking strategy is a Provincial investment of \$307 million for victim supports and services in Canada.

The Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy 2021, and the Accommodation Sector Registration of Guests Act 2021, are the two new legislations introduced.

"Our government voiced its commitment to tackling human trafficking early on in our mandate and we worked with a wide spectrum of stakeholders to establish a comprehensive \$307 million Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy," said Solicitor General Sylvia Jones. "These legislative changes, if passed, will reinforce the strategy's key objectives of supporting survivors, protecting children and youth, raising awareness among parents and community partners as well as dismantling criminal networks."

The Child, Youth and Family Services Act 2017 and the Prevention of Remedies for Human Trafficking Act 2017 are the two acts that will see several amendments in order to continue supporting the fight against human trafficking.

The changes include supporting long-time Provincial response, strengthening the role of children's aid societies and law enforcement, providing more support for victims and survivors, increasing governments ability to collect non-personal data and providing law enforcement agencies with better tools in order to locate and charge traffickers.

"This legislation is the first of its kind in Canada," said Ford. "It's desperately needed here in Ontario."

For more information on the new legislation and amendments, visit [Ontario.ca](#).