

New plan offers framework for prevention of sex trafficking among victims of all ages

(January 4, 2019) In response to a 2017 Minnesota legislature initiative, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has released a new strategic plan for broadening the state's successful "Safe Harbor" response to sex trafficking. The plan seeks to offer lawmakers a framework for how to improve Minnesota's laws related to adults who are victims of sex trafficking.

The current Minnesota Safe Harbor Law was originally passed in 2011. It provides the foundation for Minnesota's response to exploitation and commercial sex trafficking of youth. The Safe Harbor Program raises awareness, understanding and identification of the commercial sexual exploitation of youth. The law removed prostitution charges for youth under 18 and created a statewide system for helping sexually exploited youth by providing housing and services through age 24. This change reflected the reality that sex trafficked youth are victims.

"Minnesota has been a national leader in addressing human trafficking through its Safe Harbor program," said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm. "This plan creates a framework for us to continue the conversation about how we can better protect the safety, health and dignity of victims and survivors regardless of their age."

MDH created the plan in consultation with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Public Safety. The strategic plan also draws upon findings and recommendations from a community engagement and research process led by the Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC) at the University of Minnesota, the Advocates for Human Rights and Rainbow Research. These partners were selected as part of a legislatively-directed, competitive process.

Called for by the legislature, the new strategic plan outlines a development and implementation process for the legislature to broaden Minnesota's Safe Harbor response to sex trafficking. Whereas the current approach focuses on youth, a new proposal could include victims of all ages. The plan highlights potential next steps such as legal remedies, increased training and accountability, culturally responsive practices and planning efforts. The plan also considers the societal and institutional conditions that can lead to sex trafficking and exploitation.

The community report, titled "Safe Harbor for All: Results from a Statewide Strategic Planning Process in Minnesota," was developed with input from nearly 300 stakeholders statewide representing a wide range of personal, cultural and professional experiences.

"This project engaged a wide range of knowledgeable experts from across Minnesota. We listened to those most affected by sex trafficking, exploitation, and commercial sex, including communities of color, indigenous people, immigrants, and those in the LGBTQ community," said Lauren Martin, director of research at UROC and the report's lead researcher. "As a result, our report gets to the complexities, harms and root causes of sex trafficking and exploitation in commercial sex, as well as opportunities for consensus and areas of agreement for next steps."

The MDH "Safe Harbor for All: Statewide Sex Trafficking Victim/Survivors Strategic Plan" is available at [Safe Harbor for All](#). The partner research report is available at ["Safe Harbor for All: Results from a Statewide Strategic Planning Process in Minnesota."](#)

"Human trafficking is a widespread and serious human rights abuse," said Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates for Human Rights. "Our findings indicate that, while there is no simple solution or quick fix, a human rights approach allows us to focus on creating systems that allow people to live with safety, health, dignity, and justice."