

Summary
Human Trafficking Commission
December 18, 2007, meeting.

The Commission, authorized by Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 525 (2007 Session), held its first meeting on December 18, 2007. The sponsor of the legislation creating the Commission, Delegate Adam P. Ebbin was elected Chairman and Senator Kenneth Cuccinelli was elected Vice Chair.

There were two speakers on the agenda for the meeting -- Stephanie Richard, Esq., representing Boat People SOS, a non-governmental agency providing assistance to victims of human trafficking and Karen Stauss, Esq., representing the Polaris Project, also a non-governmental agency providing assistance to victims of human trafficking.

Karen Stauss urged that it is important to correctly define trafficking (Her definition is "overbearing a person's will in order to exploit the victim's labor, services or commercial sex acts.") and to identify victims and then to provide the appropriate services. She said that human trafficking has nothing necessarily to do with transportation of the victims, that it is not human smuggling.

Of the three "3 P's" paradigm - Protection, Prevention and Prosecution, she said most states succeed only in prosecution and that protection and prevention go lacking. She noted that Virginia does not have a specific trafficking crime or any trafficking victim protection provisions in the law. She stressed the need for trafficking awareness and prevention initiatives and for improved criminal statutes targeting traffickers.

Stephanie Richard began her presentation with brief descriptions of case histories. She observed that the coercion most often seen in these cases is not physical or by force, but usually accomplished by psychological means.

She also stressed the need for identification of victims of trafficking, and the need for outreach to and education of those who would be providers of services to trafficking victims. It is her opinion that Virginia needs to involve more non-governmental organizations (NGO's) that might assist in providing services. Victims of trafficking are especially vulnerable she said, because they have no support services to utilize. They typically lack family ties and support, and have no home but the one they were compelled to live in as a trafficking victim. The NGO's try to find them housing, food, etc., at homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, friends' homes, if such exist or are available. There are very few beds available at the very few NGO's providing the services.

A short question and answer period followed the presentations. The availability of grants for state agencies and NGO's was discussed. It is unclear if they are now available and from what entity. Some services are available from the Federal government for certain refugees.

Full copies of (Powerpoint) presentations by both presenters are available on this website.