

### Introduction to Human Trafficking

*Polaris Project, RI – November 2006*

As defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, the legal definition of “trafficking in persons” is

- The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Both foreign nationals and U.S. citizens are trafficked for a variety of purposes, including commercial sex, agricultural work, and domestic servitude. The majority of victims are women, but can be also be men and children.

The criminal operations of traffickers vary greatly and include individual pimps, small families, loose-knit decentralized criminal networks, and international organized crime syndicates.

Human trafficking is the third largest criminal industry in the world (behind arms and drugs), and the fastest growing.

While National laws are in place, State laws and local task forces are essential for making a local impact. Without comprehensive Rhode Island legislation, our state is left to depend on the limited resources of federal prosecutors and the FBI to address all local trafficking concerns.

This past Tuesday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, a human trafficking forum co-sponsored by the Mayor’s office and the National Council of Jewish Women was held at the Marriott. Some major issues were put forward. There are about ten to eleven brothels in the city of Providence alone, operating under the guise of “spas” and “massage parlors.” The police are aware of these brothels that contain mostly South Korean women who are victims of trafficking. The women are confined in these brothels all day long, forced to serve multiple clients a day living in very poor conditions. The Providence Police cannot prosecute the owners and profiteers because of a very inadequate prostitution law in Rhode Island, which only prohibits outdoor soliciting of clients. Currently, there is work being done by the Mayor’s office and other interested parties to attempt to draft new legislation that will be both effective and practical. The goals of this legislation will be to allow the Providence Police to raid, shut down, and prosecute all parties involved in the trafficking process and the purchase of its services. These women who are foreign to our country and being victimized in a most appalling way must be allowed justice.

NASW-RI representatives, Ruth Wartenburg and Giselle Routhier will be participating in a task force sponsored by the Rhode Island Chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women. This task force will be involved in developing an action plan to help eradicate human trafficking in Rhode Island.