

Statement of the Problem

Human trafficking is the fastest growing organized crime activity in the United States, making more than \$150 billion a year for traffickers while destroying the lives of tens of thousands of innocent children.ⁱ Trafficking is a persistent problem in the United States and around the globe.

Human traffickers are enabled by technology which gives them reach to communities, families, and children worldwide. There are more than 56 million school children in the United States.ⁱⁱ Eighty-four percent of teenagers and 53% of preteens now own a smartphone immersing them in a rich and complex digital world that many adults need decoding to understand.ⁱⁱⁱ As access to technology explodes, so do teens' digital footprints. Nearly all U.S. teens use at least one social media platform and 45% report that they are online "almost constantly."^{iv} Because teens have a significant presence on social media, sexual predators and child traffickers frequently target those platforms.

Fifty-seven percent of teens already turn to each other—rather than to parents, teachers, or other adults for help and support after negative experiences online, and 62% count themselves as primarily responsible for their own online safety.^v In 2015, 71% of U.S. teens used Facebook. By 2018, that number was only 51% and Instagram and Snapchat had displaced Facebook as teens' most used social media platform.^{vi} Each new platform creates new means for traffickers to target children and new challenges for parents, schools, and law enforcement to educate and protect our nation's youth. Though there is no standard profile of a child-trafficking victim, several risk factors make certain children more vulnerable, such as a history of sexual abuse, dating violence, low self-esteem, and minimal social support, all of which can be exposed by a quick online conversation.^{vii} Another high risk and overlooked demographic facing human

trafficking dangers are Native Americans. In 2016, a reported 506 Native American women disappeared or were killed in American cities.^{viii} In Phoenix, among the top trafficking jurisdictions in the US, it was estimated that 40% of sex trafficking victims in 2015 were Native American.^{ix}

Schools can and should be safe havens for students and even more so for some students whose lives are otherwise characterized by instability and lack of safety or security.^x In Fairfax County, Virginia, the Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force has compiled records of over 500 sex trafficking cases since 2013. Unfortunately, all their 26 high schools have had human trafficking cases.^{xi} School personnel are uniquely well positioned to educate, identify, provide awareness, report suspected abuse, and connect students to services that can prevent trafficking and even save lives.^{xii}

To protect our communities, families, and our children in today's online world, a new approach to bring prevention and awareness to this growing and expanding network of global human traffickers is needed.

Project Design and Implementation

The National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C), in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) will create a collaborative, multidisciplinary program titled *Traffic S.T.O.P. (Signs to Observe and Prevent)*. Facilitated by School Resource Officers (SROs), anti-human trafficking task force members, and educators, Traffic S.T.O.P. exemplifies a collaborative approach in many ways. It strengthens existing partnerships by bringing SROs and ECM Task Force members even more deeply into their schools and communities.