



-All Sector Bulletin- Snapshot of Labor Trafficking in Virginia



What is Labor Trafficking?

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines labor trafficking as: “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.”

Key Points

- Labor trafficking occurs in both legitimate and illicit industries, often hidden in plain sight. In Virginia, venues with the highest number of victims were domestic work, construction, and food service. [NHTH](#)

Forms of Labor Trafficking

- Bonded labor or “debt bondage”: Labor is demanded as a form of “repayment” for a loan or service that was provided with defined terms and conditions that expand over time.
- Forced labor: Victims are forced to work by traffickers using violence, threat of violence and intimidation, or other forms of coercion.
- Child labor: Form of forced labor that is harmful to the wellbeing of children, including education, development, and social needs.
- There are different forms of labor trafficking, including bonded labor, forced labor, and child labor. Bonded labor is likely the most used method.
- In order to be considered and prosecuted as labor trafficking, the use of force, fraud, or coercion must be present.

Traffickers’ Tactics

A trafficker’s profile can vary and includes: family members, employers, strangers, or romantic partners. They also leverage various methods to recruit, control, and exploit. Traffickers tailor tactics but will always use forms of force, fraud, or coercion

Examples

- **Force**
 - Physical abuse, burning, drug abuse, rape, isolation, and torture.
- **Fraud**
 - False promises of employment, false relationship, and withholding wages.
- **Coercion**
 - Threats of deportation or harm, debt bondage, confiscation of documents, isolation, and blackmail.

Recent Virginia Prosecution

In December 2022, four individuals were charged with an alleged labor trafficking scheme that operated for at least four years in a commercial laundry facility in Williamsburg, VA. The indictment states the defendants engaged in forced labor, money laundering, and immigration-related offenses. Court documents highlight the long hours in poor working conditions, as well as numerous threats of violence and deportation, that employees had to endure. In February 2023, one of the defendants charged pleaded guilty to human trafficking and forced labor. [DOJ](#)

Victim Considerations

There are many reasons why victims do not ask for help, especially from law enforcement. The victims may have negative personal views or are told by their traffickers to distrust officers. Victims may have language barriers, no knowledge of their rights or surroundings and may be disoriented or fearful in the environment. For foreign victims, traffickers commonly use immigration papers, threats of deportation or arrest, or threats against family in the country of origin. Additionally, victims are often closely monitored, controlled, and provided with carefully crafted cover stories by their trafficker. It is important to note that not all victims identify as such, which may be the first hurdle.

Questions To Consider

- Do the workers have freedom of movement?
- Do workers live and work in the same place?
- Do workers have control over their own documents?
- Do workers have any signs of trauma, fatigue, or injuries?
- What are building security measures (bouncers, cameras)?
- What are the working conditions and safety equipment?
- What is the worker attitude?
- What are the means of communications (is it 3rd party)?

Please report any information regarding human trafficking or human trafficking related activity to the VFC at VFC@vfc.vsp.virginia.gov

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