



NC Human Trafficking Commission: General Meeting
Thursday, April 25, 2024, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
WebEx through the NC Judicial Center / Hickory Board Room (A-1-101)

10:01 AM – Presentation of Awards

Director Boyce

Maggie Brewer, Chair

Chair Brewer began with the presentation of awards then turned it over to Director Boyce. Director Boyce thanked Commissioner Jennifer Haigwood for all her great work and gave her an award recognizing her outstanding service and dedication to ending human trafficking in North Carolina. Chair Brewer provided a brief introduction of TJ Bugbee and expressed our gratitude for the work he's done, presenting him an award as well.

10:10 AM – Swearing in of new Commissioner:

Judge Wilson

Lt. Jordan Reese

Chair Brewer shared the exciting news about Lieutenant Jordan Reese joining the Commission as our newest Commissioner. Judge Wilson administered the oath to swear in Lt. Reese.

10:14 AM – Call to Order & Roll Call Attendance

Maggie Brewer

Chair Brewer opened the meeting and called to order. She then conducted a verbal roll call to document attendance. Commissioners in attendance at the meeting were Amy Auth, Caitlin Brooks (joined 10:04 am), Maggie Brewer, Judge Wilson, Judge Hill, Kindl Detar (joined 10:14 am), Dr. Myers, Tina Pennington (left 11:00 am), Lt. Reese, and DA Billy West (joined 10:09 am). Also in attendance were Commission Executive Director, Christine Long, Grants Administrator, Kathy Estrada, Grant Managers, Kristen Howe, Jacqueline Kehinde, and Ellen Smith Chupik, Data Manager, Ashawntee Cabello, Court Management Specialist, Ashley Tauscher, and Administrative Secretary, Lauren Amato. Members of the public were also able to view or listen to the meeting via WebEx.

10:15 AM – Ethics Reminder

Maggie Brewer

Approval of the Minutes: 2/22/2024

[\(See Final Meeting Minutes 2/22/2024\)](#)

Chair Brewer read the required ethics statement. She then thanked all in attendance and asked if there were changes to the minutes from the February 22nd, 2024, meeting. No changes were noted. DA Billy West made a motion to approve the minutes and Commissioner Brooks seconded the motion. The minutes passed unanimously.

10:17 AM – Committee Reports and Action Items

Maggie Brewer

Legislative Committee

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Christine Long

Commissioner Brooks passed it over to Christine Long to provide legislative updates. Senator Alexander's office is still working on some our items and Sarah Byrne has been assisting them, with hopes to get them through in the short session. The grant appropriation received in 2021 needs a technical correction.

Public Health Committee

Dr. Corrina Myers, Committee Chair

Dr. Myers talked about how the initial planning meeting went for the public health committee. The meeting was productive, and we touched base on picking up where things left off, what resources were already available, and how to best utilize those resources moving forward. Dr. Myers expressed interested in using trainings already developed for health care workers then expanding and training various programs across North Carolina. She plans to work with Chair Brewer and Christine to identify interested persons to help with trainings.

Appropriations Committee

Kathy Estrada, Grants Administrator

[\(See Appropriations Report\)](#)

Grants Administrator, Kathy Estrada provided various updates on the committee.

Section 16.20 – Grants for Nonprofit Organizations Providing Services to Victims of Human Trafficking

Quarter 3 reports were recently due and grant staff are working through all reports. The current grant manager for this section has resigned, and we are working through a transition plan and posting this position.

Section 16.23 – Economic Assistance Funds for Organizations that Provide Services to Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

There is a great deal of report reviews for this section. There are 2 grant managers handling this grant and Kathy is working with HR to create another grant manager position to help. Extensions are going to be offered to grantees since the period of performance end date is June 30th, 2024. In addition to creating the new grant manager position, we are also trying to hire some temps – the positions are already posted.

Section 16.21 – Competitive Grants for Nonprofit Organizations Providing Services to Victims of Human Trafficking

The first disbursement of the first round went out and the focus has turned to round 2. The round 2 request for proposals closed on March 8th, 2024, receiving a total of 29 applications. The next step is the scoring stage which the appropriations committee will discuss in their meeting tomorrow, Friday, April 26th, 2024. The position for this section is vacant as well but we are interviewing and have selected a candidate.

Other Updates

Monitoring update – we are still working with procurement for the grants management system.

Public Safety Committee

Sgt. Jeffrey Rink

Sergeant Jeffrey Rink talked about the upcoming IPC trainings (Interdiction for the Protection of Children) in June and September. The first is in Lumberton and the second is in Granville County. There is a third training in the works in Jacksonville.

10:31 AM – Trend: Nursing Industry – Forced Labor

Attorney Magen Kellam

[\(See Nursing Trend Presentation\)](#)

Attorney Magen Kellam presented on forced labor penalty provisions and fraud in nursing contracts. She provided a brief introduction about herself and the work she does. She litigates lesser-known types of labor trafficking, primarily involving immigrant nurses with cases coming from across the United States. This is a

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problem that is growing exponentially as the U.S. is experiencing a healthcare staffing crisis. There were more registered nurse jobs available in 2022 than any other profession in the U.S with an average of 200,000 nurse positions opening every year. This led employers to look elsewhere to fill the staffing gaps in their facilities and the solution was international nurses. The Philippines is one of the largest exporters of nurses worldwide ranking 4th in the origin for the most employment-based immigrants with 80% of the workers sent to the U.S. being healthcare workers. Filipino nurses are desirable because of their education, training, and qualifications on arrival. The immigration process can be confusing and complicated and is a part of why this is becoming such a problem. In order for a worker to be brought in the United States with a green card to work, they generally have to have a sponsoring employer. This is a highly regulated rigorous process called labor certification. It's a multi-step process that takes years and is strictly overseen by the Department of Labor and USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services). Nurses qualify for a special visa category called schedule A which serves as almost a back door. It's an expedited process where the immigration application gets to skip the first step with the department of labor, the DOL pre-certification. Since the nurses are skipping the line, a great deal of oversight is being missed. It has been an area of vulnerability for both U.S. and foreign workers as staffing agencies and companies know the lack of oversight and take advantage. Magen shared a brief summary of a case to show what she's been seeing.

A nurse living abroad was enticed by promises of high pay, free housing, etc. needing only to sign. The interview for the position at the embassy was the first time the nurse saw any documentation and the details of the position were confusing i.e. who the employer was, where the position was, etc. With little experience in this process, the nurse thought this was normal. Once signed up, the yearlong immigration process would begin. The nurse arrived in the middle of the night then was picked up by the free transportation which ended up being a stranger. Things only continued to get worse. The driver informed the nurse the contract had to be signed before being taken to the employer provided housing. The nurse was exhausted and signed the contract without really looking at it, not knowing this was a new contract with a provision that said the if the employee left the employer before 3 years, the employee would have to pay \$40,000.00. After signing, the nurse was forced to live in substandard housing, did not have job assignments upon arrival, was forced to work in different positions (not RN), was assigned to undesirable shifts at unsafe facilities, experienced wage theft and pay violations, and was prevented from working down the contract term. The nurse was new to the U.S. and didn't know how our legal system worked so continued to work out of fear. The nurse wanted to quit but was told to pay \$40,000.00 or be deported or sued. Once the nurse fled, they were served with a lawsuit for \$50,000.00 and sought help from a lawyer. The first attorney the nurse spoke with misunderstood since the nurse didn't really understand and was misinformed.

Unfortunately, these cases often missed because of lack of understanding of the legal system. Cases like this one are misunderstood and companies are quick to settle in exchange for silence of the nurses. In addition, there isn't much historical precedence for these cases, so we have limited precedent decisions. Also, as we become more aware, those taking advantage shift as well and have started to include arbitration clauses in the contracts. Reoccurring issues and challenges are listed on the last page of the presentation. Commissioners inquired further about this topic.

11:00 AM – Lessons Learned in Child Welfare

**Hannah Hopper, Social Worker
Gaston County**
[\(See Child Welfare Presentation\)](#)

Gaston County Social Worker Hannah Hopper presented on the intersection of human trafficking and child welfare. Hannah provided background on why Gaston County decided human trafficking and sexual assault social worker was a position they should apply for grant-wise. Hannah was hired to the teen unit for Gaston County DHHS in permanency planning. DHHS obtained a grant because they saw an increase in runaway cases

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and at-risk youth, asking Hannah if she would be interested and she accepted. A majority of the children who were victims of child sex trafficking have been involved with child welfare services. Children and youth involved in out of placement care have a higher risk of running away which puts them at a greater risk for trafficking as well. Youth in the juvenile justice system may be misidentified and treated as criminals charged with prostitution, truancy or petty theft when they are being controlled by a trafficker. The risk factors include sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, history of arrest and/or absent caregivers, child welfare involvement, mental health issues, witnessing violence in the home, family legal problems, and suicidality. These risk factors put children and youth at a greater risk of being trafficked and traffickers target children and youth because of their increased vulnerability. Child sexual and physical abuse increases likelihood of being arrested for prostitution, engaging in survival sex work, and running away. The program design for Hannah's position had a target population of 13-21-year-old foster youth with a special focus on runaways and youth aging out of the system and includes a list of responsibilities in her presentation. The objectives were to build awareness of trafficking, improve outcomes for children who have been victimized or were at risk, and provide trainings specific to child sex trafficking for child welfare workers and related professionals. The multi-disciplinary team was made up multiple community members. Hannah then went into a brief overview of one of her cases. In each case Hannah was involved in, there was a lesson learned. In the first case example, she learned that inability to make personal choices affects outcomes for juveniles. The second case example taught Hannah that the ability to make choices helps ensure safety. The third case example taught Hannah that early identification and prevention is key. The cases shared have a few factors in common including multiple CPS reports and CPS involvement, substance use in child and parents, mental health diagnosis, physical abuse, witness to violence, AWOL behavior, and not identifying as a victim. These cases also show a need for thinking outside the box and there were a handful of items that needed reassessed including risk assessment, coordinated response, specialized treatment, safety planning, and prevention efforts. Hannah described the implementation of CSE-IT or the commercial sexual exploitation identification tool. The coordinated response with Hannah's position specifically incorporated her presence and expertise in various steps with CPS and permanency planning. Safety planning and run prevention strategies evolved to allowing youth to define their own version of safety. Hannah and the youth were having honest conversations about expectations and policies, allowing youth to have say so in their treatment plan, identifying strengths and motivation within youth, and meeting the youth where they are at. The safety plan resulted in specialized treatment plans. Upon having these conversations, it was discovered that the locked facilities were not working so instead they tried allowing the youth to have say so in the treatment plan, identified agencies that can specialize treatment plans, used evidence based therapeutic modalities that have led to positive outcomes, and coordinated with DJJ if applicable. The last needs identified that Hannah and her team are working on addressing is prevention and identification. There are a few resources Hannah uses to help with this including Blind Spot (educational class for youth), community identification and trainings, missing from care (runaway) prevention, and CSE-IT scores discussed at every CAC MDT. Ultimately, there is a lot that has been learned and human trafficking may not be the most traumatic thing that has occurred to these youth. There are many things we can change moving forward to be more successful in these instances. Commissioners inquired further about this topic.

11:52 AM – General Staff Report

Christine Long

[\(See Staff Report\)](#)

Our Court Management Specialist, Ashley Tauscher, started off the staff report. Ashley is our Governor's Crime Commission staff member that helps provide and coordinate much of the training and requests for training. She talked about the training and events conducted since the last General Commission meeting. There are a handful of training events coming up in May, June, and September.

Administrative Secretary, Lauren Amato provided an update on the Facility Improvement grant. All extensions

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have been executed with agencies that extended their project. The close-out process has started for any that did not extend. We're reviewing Quarter 5 & 6 reports and receiving Quarter 7 reports. A small number of agencies are waiting on reversion instructions to return unspent funds. All funds must be spent, and projects completed by June 30th, 2024.

Executive Director, Christine Long touched briefly on the Facility Improvement grant providing a little background.

Director Long also thanked Sontanna, our intern, who has been with the organization since September. Sontanna came from NC State with the MSW program and finishes today. The Guardian Ad Litem program applied for the Office of Victims Crime grant. If funded, the HTC would be a partner to help further efforts and training. Christine talked about Lindsey Lane, who has worked with our organization and some other local attorneys in the state to put together a plan for training and education that has been submitted to the Conference of DA's. There are some positive things happening like the cinema that is interested in having ongoing human trafficking messaging playing in the theatre. Other good news includes Ashley's grant being renewed for a second year. Our focus has been diverted more so to the grant appropriations lately with all that has been going on with them. There were also public records requests that have taken time to fulfill.

12:01 PM – Public Comment

Maggie Brewer

Commission Chair Brewer opened the floor for public comment. Pam Strickland with NC Stop Human Trafficking spoke briefly. Their organization has the North Carolina Human Trafficking Prevention Conference coming up in May (next week). More information can be found on their website. Dan Nicks expressed interest in presenting at a future commission meeting. He also asked about updates regarding TVAP with USCRI.

12:08 PM – Adjournment

Maggie Brewer

Commissioner Haigwood moved to adjourn the meeting and Kindl seconded the motion. Commission Chair Brewer adjourned the meeting. The next meeting is Thursday, June 27th, 2024.