



**Ina Mendez**  
**Deputy Commissioner, Family Permanency Services**  
**Testimony to the New York City Council**  
**Committees on Children and Youth, Public Safety and Women and Gender Equity**  
**January 28, 2025**

Good afternoon. My name is Ina Mendez and I am the Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Family Permanency Services at the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS). I am joined here today by Sabine Chery, the Associate Commissioner of the Office of Older Youth Development Services within the Division. Together we oversee the Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy (OCTPP), which manages our efforts to educate ACS, providers and the public on human trafficking; and to screen, identify, track and provide services to any child or youth who comes into contact with ACS and who has been trafficked.

We want to thank Chair Stevens, Chair Salaam, Chair Louis, and the members of the City Council Children and Youth, Public Safety, and Women and Gender Equity Committees for holding today's oversight hearing on "Supports for Young Victims of Human Trafficking." As many here today know, January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Awareness Month, and we appreciate the opportunity this hearing presents for us to increase public awareness of trafficking, while sharing with you the efforts we take at ACS to help prevent and address trafficking for the children, youth and families who are involved with ACS through child protection, prevention, foster care and/or our juvenile justice work.

Unfortunately, in part due to its many transportation options and arteries, New York State has one of the highest sex and labor trafficking rates in the United States. Traffickers target those children and youth who are most vulnerable to exploitation, including those who have previously faced trauma, abuse, neglect, and homelessness. So, while anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, children and youth in foster care and runaway and homeless youth are particularly vulnerable, which makes it essential

for both ACS and our colleagues at DYCD to be alert to trafficking when working with the children and youth we serve.

ACS is committed to identifying and helping sex and labor trafficked children and youth achieve safety and obtain resources to help them heal and thrive. At ACS, our goals have been to help develop awareness within the child welfare system towards preventing young people from being trafficked, and also to provide targeted services to address the trauma for young people who have been trafficked. ACS's Office of Child Trafficking Prevention & Policy conducts outreach, public education and awareness building; provides training and technical assistance; identifies prevention and intervention resources; provides expert consultations to ACS staff and providers; and makes connections and referrals for needed services.

Today's testimony will provide brief overviews of these areas of focus: 1) screening, identifying and tracking; 2) providing services and supports for children and youth who have been trafficked and 3) education and training.

### Screening, Identification and Tracking

In September 2014, the federal government passed the "Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act" to help address sex trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children involved in the child welfare system. Pursuant to state and federal law, ACS is required to screen all children and youth entering foster care for possible trafficking, as well as any child or youth returning to foster care after any period of being Absent Without Consent (AWOC).

To accomplish this, in 2015 ACS created the Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy and issued its trafficking policy in 2020, which remains in effect. In short, it requires child welfare staff to screen all children and youth, and outlines the steps for identification, documentation, safety planning, and provision of appropriate services to children who are sex trafficking victims or at risk of becoming sex trafficking victims, as well as guidance and procedures for children who are identified as labor trafficked or organ trafficked. In addition, youth entering detention are screened by the mental health team and all youth participating in FAP community based alternative programming are screened.

ACS created the Child Trafficking Database, which is an electronic, cloud-based database in which ACS child welfare and provider agency staff can complete the mandated sex trafficking screening tools.<sup>1</sup> ACS also has a Child Trafficking Mailbox where any ACS or provider agency staff member can both report youth as having been possibly trafficked and receive expert assistance through one of our master's level social workers in our specialized office. All child welfare and provider agency staff are required to complete the mandated sex trafficking screenings in ACS's Child Trafficking Database. Screening children for trafficking is not only legally mandated but is also one of the best prevention and safety planning tools.

The City Council's Local Law 41 of 2016 requires ACS (and DYCD) to annually report on the number of youth "who are referred as, self-report as, or who... ACS later determines to be sexually exploited children" and to provide a description of the

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<sup>1</sup> By law, families participating in voluntary prevention and FAP services (referred to as Advocates cases) cannot have electronic child welfare records; the teams complete paper tools for these youth outside of the database.

services ACS provides to youth who are or have been sexually exploited. As reported in our 2023 Annual Report, in 2023, ACS and DYCD jointly identified and served 760 youth who were sexually exploited or at high risk of exploitation, of which 457 were identified through various ACS mechanisms including our child trafficking mailbox, the Child Trafficking Database, our contracted counselors at the Children’s Center, our prevention service and FAP providers, our contracted Safe Harbour grant funded service providers, and through OTDA as a confirmed victim<sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that these numbers are challenging, as many youth who are considered at-risk of sexual exploitation may have actually been trafficked but have chosen not to disclose.

### Services and Supports for Youth Who Have Been Trafficked

The Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy provides direct clinical and technical support for professionals, consults with and supports Federal, State, City and community-based agencies, assists in law enforcement recovery operations and coordinates the Safe Harbour Program for New York County, which works to synchronize services for trafficked and at-risk children both within and external to the child welfare system. We also offer free tattoo removal services for trafficked or gang involved youth.

ACS’s Missing Children’s Outreach Unit provides guidance and technical assistance to foster care provider agencies when a child is absent without consent (AWOC). The unit also works with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

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<sup>2</sup> ACS reports annually on the number of youth OTDA has confirmed as victims of human trafficking as part of the local law report. The data is collected for the local law report. Due to confidentiality, OTDA shares only numbers and not names with ACS. Some of these youth could be duplicates of youth served by ACS or DYCD.

and ACS's Investigative Consultants (retired NYPD detectives who support on the most challenging cases) to find AWOC youth. Because of this work, our number of AWOC youth continues to trend downward. Every youth returning from AWOC is screened for possible trafficking.

We also plan for youth's physical, psychological and emotional safety, which includes referring youth to trauma informed service providers who are knowledgeable about trafficking. ACS collaborates with a number of organizations, such as Day One, the Hetrick Martin Institute, the Door, Safe Horizon, Sanctuary for Families, and many more,<sup>3</sup> to provide much-needed services for these youth, including: medical, mental health, counseling, career and education, and legal services as well as support groups, peer mentoring, and art therapy.

We also created an ACS Credible Messenger Program, where adult former trafficked foster care youth share their experiences with child welfare involved youth to develop trafficking recruitment and resource awareness. Further, ACS contracts with Children's Village Empower House to provide on-site social workers at the ACS Children's Center to screen and assess youth for trafficking indicators, assist staff in identifying exploited youth, and provide recommendations and referrals when need. They also conduct workshops for the youth at the Children's Center on both trafficking awareness and developing healthy relationships.

We believe children who have been trafficked or who are at a higher risk for trafficking need a suite of comprehensive services to not only help them to begin

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<sup>3</sup> The full list of trafficking services agencies which have all been vetted, can be found here: [ACS - Human Trafficking Prevention Virtual Resource Fair](#)

healing from the mental and physical trauma of this experience, but also set on a path towards a happy, healthy adulthood. That's why ACS works with our provider partners, sister agencies, and other organizations to provide wraparound resources that empower them to thrive.

In addition, healthy relationships are the key to preventing and stopping trafficking, which is one of the many reasons we have invested in Fair Futures coaches for thousands of youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems. As announced in the State of the City and Preliminary budget, we are grateful to the administration for additional investments in this critical work.

### Education and Training

At ACS, we strongly believe that the best way to both prevent and identify the trafficking of children and youth is to educate—our staff, our provider staff, our colleagues and the community. As we speak today, the Executive Director of the Office is training 40 Family Court Judges, and this month, as part of Human Trafficking Prevention Month, we have organized 18 expert workshops, open to the public<sup>4</sup>.

The Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy has trained over 47,000 people since its launch in 2015. We work to ensure that staff in all divisions and provider agencies know how to screen, identify and serve youth who are trafficked. Every new CPS receives training as part of the onboarding process; at least one person from every foster care and prevention provider has been trained; and every ACS child-serving division has a trained liaison. In 2024, we offered 87 trainings that included 12,645

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<sup>4</sup> The full listing, agenda and directions to register can be found here: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/youth/childtrafficking/2025/ct-prevention-conference-program.pdf>

attendees (some people could be duplicates.) In addition, 750 people took our e-learn session on how to use the screening tool.

Continuing our tradition of high-quality awareness and skill focused trainings, in 2025 OCTPP will offer a spring training series in April as part of child abuse prevention month and in October as a back-to-school fall training series, in addition to the 18-session series currently underway. I am including information about the training sessions underway with this testimony. Additionally, we hold monthly Child Trafficking Database (CTDB) trainings and a variety of additional trafficking prevention related events throughout the year.

Finally, the ACS web site includes a section specifically dedicated to preventing trafficking, which we hope the Council and others here today will visit:

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/traffickedyouth.page>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, ACS wants to thank all of our partners, including our sister agencies, our provider partners, and the City Council, for all that you do each and every day to prevent youth from being trafficked, and to identify and provide services to those who have been exploited.



# 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference

Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning  
**18 Virtual Participatory Workshops**



## Conference Registration Instructions:

- **Registration is directly through each workshop's individual Teams link**
  - The virtual platform will be Microsoft Teams.
  - The Teams registration links are listed in the [Workshop Registration Links](#) section on pages 3, 4 and 5 of this program.
  - To enter a workshop, you will be required to register by entering your name, title, agency, city, state and email. Attendees should always **register and enter at least 10 minutes before the workshop start time in case troubleshooting is needed**. We cannot assist with troubleshooting after a workshop has started. Early registration is always appreciated to be able to view prospective participation.
  - You can register in advance, or you can register right before a workshop.
  - After you register, Teams will send an email with the workshop entry link, and a reminder email one hour before the workshop begins.
  - **Save the email with the Teams link** to enter the workshop on its scheduled day. The email comes directly from Teams. We cannot replicate the email.
  - There is no password required. Anyone with the join link can attend.
- **All workshop hours are scheduled for Eastern Standard Time (EST).**
- **For all questions and troubleshooting, email [Traffickingtraining@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:Traffickingtraining@acs.nyc.gov)**

# 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning

## 2025 Conference Workshops at a Glance

Day	Date	AM/PM	Time (EST)	Workshop Title
Th	9	PM	12:30 pm to 4:30 pm	Understanding Child Trafficking; A Bio-Psycho-Social Perspective
F	10	AM	11:00 am to 1:00 pm	Trauma-Informed Art Therapy for Kids
M	13	PM	1:00 pm to 4:00 pm	Sextortion - The Global Pandemic
T	14	PM	2:00 pm to 4:00 pm	A Historical Perspective of the New York State Court System's Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
W	15	PM	10:00 am to 1:00 pm	Learning How to Successfully Utilize NCMEC Resources for Child Sex Trafficking Prevention & Response
Th	16	AM	10:00 am to 12:00 pm	Working With LGBTQ+ Youth Who Have Experienced or Are At-Risk For Sex Trafficking
Th	16	PM	1:00 pm to 4:00 pm	Foreign National Trafficking in the United States
F	17	AM	11:00 am to 1:00 pm	Gangs and Sex Trafficking in New York City
T	21	PM	2:00 pm to 4:00 pm	Keeping our Communities Safe through Awareness and Prevention: HSI New York's Child Exploitation Investigations Team: Utilizing Technology and Investigative Techniques to Combat Sextortion, Trafficking, and other Sex Offenses on Social Media and the Dark Web
W	22	AM	10:00 am to 11:30 am	Survivor Voices: The "Here for You" Credible Messengers Program - Video and Panel
W	22	PM	2:00 pm to 4:00 pm	The Lost Boys – Forgotten Victims of the Child Abuse Material Industry
Th	23	AM	10:00 am to 1:00 pm	Safety Planning <u>WITH</u> Trafficked Youth
Th	23	PM	2:00 pm to 4:00 pm	Domestic Minor Labor Trafficking
F	24	AM	11:00 am to 1:00 pm	Turning Trauma into Talent: The Journey to Empowerment in "The Academy": Film Premier from Foster Care Unplugged - Video and Discussion
M	27	PM	1:00 pm to 4:00 pm	Law & Order NYC - From Arrest to Conviction: NYPD Human Trafficking Squad & District Attorney Human Trafficking Bureau - Case Discussions
Th	30	AM	10:00 am to 1:00 pm	NYC's Child Welfare Trafficking Policy and Screening Children for Sex Trafficking in ACS' Child Trafficking Database (CTDB)
Th	30	PM	2:00 pm to 4:00 pm	Post -Traumatic Growth and Trauma Resolution
F	31	AM	10:00 am to 1:00 pm	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Awareness: What You <u>NEED</u> To Know

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Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning

## Workshop Registration Links:

1. Registration for each workshop is through the workshop's link below.
2. You must register separately for each workshop.
3. After you register, Teams will send an email with the link to enter the workshop.
4. If you register in advance, save the email with the link to be able to enter on the day of the workshop.
5. Consider pasting the Teams email with the workshop entry link, or the link itself into your e-calendar for speedy access.

- Jan 9 (Thurs) from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm:  
**Understanding Child Trafficking: A Bio-Psycho-Social Perspective**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/19075ca3-e14b-43ce-865c-970053fc74bf@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 10 (Fri) from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm  
**Trauma-Informed Art Therapy for Kids**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/1d73f355-6ba1-4fe2-938f-eed45367aa2e@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 13 (Mon) from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**Sextortion: The Global Pandemic**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/06a59a4c-8597-4151-809d-8ed54ae10952@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 14 (Tues) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**A Historical Perspective of the New York State Court System's Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/912f7177-43d8-470b-ab08-21d6ba5bf2e6@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 15 (Wed) from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm:  
**Learning How to Successfully Utilize NCMEC Resources for Child Sex Trafficking Prevention & Response**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/9f05cba2-e5ea-4503-bc7e-1197171c85a4@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>

**January 11<sup>th</sup> is  
National Human Trafficking Awareness Day  
#Wearblueday**

## 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

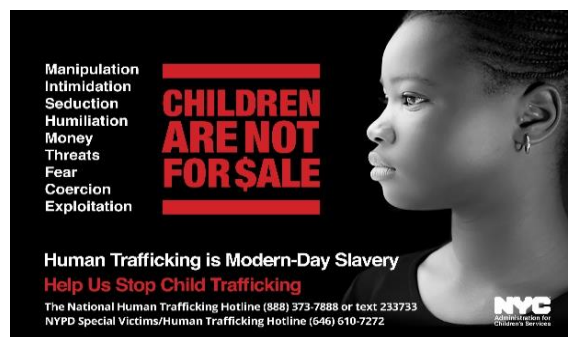
Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning

- Jan 16 (Thurs) from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm:  
**Working With LGBTQ+ Youth Who Have Experienced or Are At-Risk For Sex Trafficking**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/beff6688-41a5-417f-97f8-204f315e3d8d@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 16 (Thurs) from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**Foreign National Trafficking in the United States**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/62d259f9-3a43-4cb2-8ce6-76bbe72db1cc@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 17 (Fri) from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm:  
**Gangs and Sex Trafficking in New York City**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/384d67e2-9ff9-47ee-8937-8b2ea46b66ef@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 21 (Tues) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**Keeping our Communities Safe Through Awareness and Prevention – HSI New York’s Child Exploitation Investigations Team: Utilizing Technology and Investigative Techniques to Combat Sextortion, Trafficking, and Other Sex Offenses on Social Media and the Dark Web**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/97c8d87b-267d-4402-bd49-622813f0554f@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 22 (Wed) from 10:00 am to 11:30 am:  
**Survivor Voices: The "Here for You" Credible Messengers Program - Video and Panel**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/f95a21f9-6976-469a-be22-e60d8c4f7927@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 22 (Wed) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**The Lost Boys – Forgotten Victims of the Child Abuse Material Industry**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/bfdab227-98e5-40d8-a8a1-35aac3fb4a42@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 23 (Thurs) from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm:  
**Safety Planning WITH Trafficked Youth**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/a98e361d-000c-402b-8d4b-0f043fa98255@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>

## 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

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- Jan 23 (Thurs) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**Domestic Minor Labor Trafficking**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/d63294b9-235e-4c9e-adda-1bc459666c2d@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 24 (Fri) from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm:  
**Turning Trauma into Talent: The Journey to Empowerment in "The Academy":  
Film Premier from Foster Care Unplugged - Video and Discussion**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/3983f055-8734-42ef-a330-f71da42f65e6@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 27 (Mon) from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**Law & Order NYC - From Arrest to Conviction: NYPD Human Trafficking Squad &  
District Attorney Human Trafficking Bureaus - Case Discussions**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/bdb8c500-53ac-4488-96f8-b4ff86331d98@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 30 (Thurs) from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm:  
**NYC's Child Welfare Trafficking Policy and Screening Children for Sex Trafficking in  
ACS' Child Trafficking Database (CTDB)**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/b6389e2e-9352-4f20-993f-6ae52a8b1569@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 30 (Thurs) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm:  
**Post -Traumatic Growth and Trauma Resolution**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/a32d31b6-5e21-4354-bcdc-8bf965d7b57b@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>
- Jan 31 (Fri) from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm:  
**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Awareness: What You NEED To Know**  
**Teams Registration Link:** <https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/84f087ac-b163-41f7-be2e-1ca76f08dfe6@32f56fc7-5f81-4e22-a95b-15da66513bef>





# 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning

Print and hang this calendar near your computer so you never miss a workshop!

Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.
6	7	8	9 <u>12:30 pm:</u> Understanding Child Trafficking: A Bio-Psychosocial Perspective	10 <u>11:00 am:</u> Trauma-Informed Art Therapy for Kids
13 <u>1:00 pm:</u> Sextortion: The Global Pandemic	14 <u>2:00 pm:</u> A Historical Perspective of the New York State Court System’s Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	15 <u>10:00 am:</u> Learning How to Successfully Utilize NCMEC Resources for Child Sex Trafficking Prevention & Response	16 <u>10:00 am:</u> Working with LGBTQ+ Youth Who Have Experienced or Are At-Risk for Sex Trafficking  <u>1:00 pm:</u> Foreign National Trafficking in the United States	17 <u>11:00 am:</u> Gangs and Sex Trafficking in New York City
20 No workshops: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day	21 <u>2:00 pm</u> Keeping our Communities Safe Through Awareness and Prevention – HSI New York’s Child Exploitation Investigations Team: Utilizing Technology and Investigative Techniques to Combat Sextortion, Trafficking, and other Sex Offenses on Social Media and the Dark Web	22 <u>10:00 am:</u> Survivor Voices: The “Here for You” Credible Messengers Program - Video and Panel  <u>2:00 pm:</u> The Lost Boys – Forgotten Victims of the Child Abuse Material Industry	23 <u>10:00 am:</u> Safety Planning <u>WITH</u> Trafficked Youth  <u>2:00 pm:</u> Domestic Minor Labor Trafficking	24 <u>11:00 am:</u> Turning Trauma into Talent: The Journey to Empowerment in "The Academy": Film Premier from Foster Care Unplugged - Video and Discussion
27 <u>1:00 pm:</u> Law & Order NYC - From Arrest to Conviction: NYPD Human Trafficking Squad & District Attorney Human Trafficking Bureaus - Case Discussions	28 No workshops	29 No workshops: Lunar New Year	30 <u>10:00 am:</u> NYC’s Child Welfare Trafficking Policy and Screening Children for Sex Trafficking in ACS’ Child Trafficking Database (CTDB)  <u>2:00 pm:</u> Post Traumatic Growth and Trauma Resolution (It’s Marti’s Birthday!)	31 <u>10:00 am:</u> Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Awareness: What You <u>NEED</u> To Know



## 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning

### Workshop Descriptions:

Jan 9 (Thursday) from 12:30 am to 4:30 pm EST:

#### Understanding Child Trafficking: A Bio-Psycho-Social Perspective

- **Selina Higgins, MA, MSW, LCSW-R, DBT-C**  
Executive Director, Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy,  
NYC Administration for Children's Services

To understand trafficked children, you must first understand cognitive and social-emotional child development and the impact of trauma upon the developing psyche. This workshop will provide an extremely comprehensive view into the potential developmental etiology of child trafficking, beginning with cognitive development, infant attachment and behavioral learning influences. The attachment pattern developed between an infant and the primary caregiver can have extensive influence across the entire life cycle. The deficits and resultant needs that develop through early attachment can unconsciously impact upon subsequent relational and safety choices.

This workshop will demonstrate how the development of certain infant attachment experiences can lead to subsequent juvenile trafficking vulnerability, and how traffickers fulfill the inherent social-emotional deficits to trauma bond with and exploit youth. The presentation will proceed to the impact of trauma, teen cognitive and social-emotional development and learning, relational influences, media impact (advertisements, social media influencers, music videos), recruitment techniques, gaslighting, trauma bonding, the neuroscience of recidivism, and red flags and language affiliated with the commercial sex industry. The workshop concludes with engagement tips for work with trafficked and traumatized youth. PowerPoint, video clips, and recent media cases will be utilized to facilitate learning. This proprietary workshop, which is updated every time it is presented, has been provided at multiple national and regional conferences.

Jan 10 (Friday) from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm EST:

#### Trauma-Informed Art Therapy for Kids

- **Crystal Chen, ATR-BC, LCAT, LMHC-A**, Board Certified Licensed Creative Art Therapist, Eating Recovery Center of Washington, and Garden of Hope and Center for all Abilities, New York (virtual)

Art therapy provides clients with an alternative method of communication and understanding of oneself. The art work that one creates is a reflection of the self, which can be more intimate in nature but also less intrusive. This makes it effective when working with clients who have experienced trauma. In this workshop you will learn about how art therapy can be utilized to explore the depths of trauma in children and adults, explore the benefits of art therapy, and get to do your own self-care art therapy exercise led by Art Therapist Crystal Chen, ATR-BC, LCAT, LMHC-A. No art skills or knowledge is necessary to participate in the art therapy exercise. This is a hands-on workshop, so the following art supplies will make it fun and productive:

- 4 sheets of paper
- Scissors
- Pens/pencils
- Coloring utensils

# 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

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**Jan 13 (Wednesday) from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST:  
Sextortion – The Global Pandemic**

- **Opal Singleton Hendershot**, President & CEO of Million Kids, Author, Instructor, Radio Host

Sextortion and Social Media Exploitation are some of the fastest growing crimes in the world. Often the targets are minors but also can exploit adults, especially the elderly. This is technology driven. Recent Artificial intelligence developments mean, no one will be safe from extortion. Anyone who has an image online will not be safe as technology can alter their appearance, their voice, their location and even their surroundings, making humiliating images and voice emulation a reality for potential blackmail.

The world has experienced a global technological transformation never seen before in history, Sextortion cases have become dramatically more prolific and complex. In 2023/24 the world was connected through high- speed 5G internet placing technology in the hands of criminals around the world and connecting them to teens by direct messaging, video game chat rooms, and dating/hookup sites.

Most apps have money transfer capability enabling blackmail payments. Many apps have geo location software, creating easy access to minors to meet up and violate the victim. Mass audience live streaming technology like Roblox, TikTok, Fortnite, Instagram, etc. means our kids will be connected to millions of individuals they have never met. This is especially dangerous for prepubescent kids online.

In the past few months, there have been many cases where Nigerian, Pakistani, Ivory Coast and Philippine telemarketing centers have exploited kids for large sums of money. The result has been devastating as many victims, often responsible, promising young males have taken their own lives. We will examine several of these cases to explore prevention possibilities for future victims and unique scenarios that may be valuable in future investigations.

This presentation will examine the many forms of sextortion, the motives behind the perpetrators, and where those nudes go when you hit “send”. We will look at the global financial motivations of organized crime in blackmailing our kids. We will examine cases that resulted in extreme violation, murder and death of the victim and their families. We will look at “deep fake” cases where kids sextort other kids using artificial intelligence and nudity websites. We will discuss what parents, teachers, etc. should look for and how to handle sextortion situations. We will discuss CSAM, bulletproof hosting and large-scale dark web pedophile rings and their relationship to sextortion cases.

Most important, we will examine what all of us can do to combat this horrific and life changing crime against our most vulnerable.





## 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

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**Jan 14 (Tuesday) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST:**

### **A Historical Perspective Of the New York State Court System's Response to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children**

- **Hon. Fernando Camacho**, NYS Court of Claims and Acting Supreme Court Justice, Suffolk County Family Court
- **Feride Castillo**, Co-founder of Empowerment Collaborative of Long Island (ECLI) Program Development & Education Director at ECLI-VIBES
- **Alyssa Harrilal**, Survivor Expert

The panelists will provide a historical perspective of how New York Courts have dealt with the issues of prostitution, sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. They will take the audience through a forty-year journey of changes in societal attitudes, court responses and legislation surrounding this topic through the eyes of a NYS Judge, a social worker and a trafficking survivor. From the start of Judge Camacho's career in the Manhattan DA's Office 40 years ago, through the creation of the first Human Trafficking Intervention Court in Queens County twenty years ago, to the present day ERIN Court, a treatment court assisting sex-trafficked youth in Family Court.

**Jan 15 (Wednesday) from 10:00 am to 11:00 pm EST:**

### **Learning How to Successfully Utilize National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Resources for Child Sex Trafficking Prevention & Response**

- **Kimberly Parks-Bourne & Jacqueline Gavette** – Missing Children's Division
- **Brittany Butler** – Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Services Team
- **Casey Jones** – Outreach, Training, & Prevention

In 2023, 1 out of 6 missing children reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) who had run away were likely victims of child sex trafficking. Many of these cases involved children missing from the care of child welfare. Child welfare professionals, law enforcement, and service providers are increasingly on the front lines of coordinating care, services and emergency response for survivors of child sex trafficking. At NCMEC, we've learned that trafficking prevention efforts must start at a young age and address online safety and prevention of running behavior.

This presentation will highlight examples of effective reporting and successful application of NCMEC resources when children go missing. We will cover NCMEC resources available to support parents, child welfare, law enforcement, and community partners in trafficking prevention and intervention efforts. Finally, we will cover legal criteria of federal reporting requirements for children missing from care, as well as promising practices in prevention efforts. This includes assessing for the reasons why youth run away or go missing from care, strategies for building rapport and engaging with survivors of child sex trafficking, and approaches for proactive recovery planning when youth do go missing.

#### Learning Objectives:

- Understand how to make an effective report to NCMEC, and how to successfully collaborate with NCMEC to improve case outcomes

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- Learn about NCMEC child sex trafficking prevention resources including online safety education
- Demonstrate trauma-informed and victim-centered recovery and response considerations for survivors of child sex trafficking
- Recall NCMEC resources that can assist with locating, recovering, and supporting child sex trafficking survivors

**Jan 16 (Thursday) from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm EST:**

### **Working with LGBTQ+ Youth Who Have Experienced or are At-Risk for Sex Trafficking**

- **Steven Gordon**, Director of LGBTQAI+ Equity Strategies, NYC Administration for Children's Services
- **Selina Higgins, LCSW-R**, Executive Director, Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy, NYC Administration for Children's Services
- **Clifton Robertson, LMSW**, Child Trafficking Specialist Residential Social Worker, Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy, NYC Administration for Children's Services
- **Carmen Sanchez, LCSW**, Child Trafficking Specialist Social Worker, Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy, NYC Administration for Children's Services

Co-developed by the Hetrick Martin Institute and the NYC Administration for Children's Services' Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy and Office of LGBTQAI+ Equity Strategies, this curriculum will offer both awareness and practical guidance on how to identify and provide the necessary support and resources LGBTQ+ youth who have experienced trafficking or are at risk for trafficking. Participants will:

- Develop an understanding of what is child sex trafficking.
- Gain insight into the unique vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQ+ youth and the intersection with trafficking.
- Learn about trauma-informed approaches and their application in supporting sex trafficking survivors.
- Develop cultural competency and sensitivity to better understand and connect with LGBTQ+ trafficking survivors.
- Learn how to create safe and inclusive spaces where LGBTQ+ survivors can access the help they need.
- Learn about the NYC child welfare system's policies that support LGBTQ+ and trafficked youth.
- Learn about the primary resources within NYC's child welfare system (Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy and Office of LGBTQ+ Equities) that can assist with information, service referrals and other needed help.

**\*\*The Working with LGBTQ+ Youth Who Have Experienced or are At-Risk for Sex Trafficking curriculum was funded by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services through the 2023 NYC Safe Harbour Grant.\*\***

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**Jan 16 (Thursday) from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST:  
Foreign National Trafficking in the United States**

- **Opal Singleton Hendershot**, President & CEO of Million Kids, Author, Instructor, Radio Host

Anyone can become a victim of sex or labor trafficking, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, country of origin or sexual preference. Recently, the U.S. has experienced an unprecedented number of foreign nationals entering the U.S. Some, have documentation and arrive completely within the confines of U.S. Laws. Others come in with the assistance of organized crime, gangs or individuals capitalizing on opportunities to exploit people. These individuals come from many different countries, speak other languages, and often owe money to coyotes or cartels, making them vulnerable to labor and sex trafficking. Many of the victims are minors or vulnerable women.

Most people believe that just because foreigners arrived in the U.S. they are safe. Nothing could be further from the truth. In many cases, the victims arrived in the U.S. legally on work, travel or student visas, but were duped and exploited by criminals preying on their vulnerability.

The sheer volume of potential victims, the challenges with understanding a foreign language and cultural differences, as well as the complexity and interconnectivity of these large-scale trafficking rings, have challenged law enforcement's ability to investigate, prosecute the cases and rescue the victims. It is important to understand a variety of case studies to educate on how these large-scale trafficking rings operate. This presentation will explore a wide variety of foreign national trafficking rings, including labor trafficking of Guatemalan minors, sex trafficking of Chinese, Taiwanese, Thailand, and So Korean females. Many of these sex trafficking rings, covered multiple states, most were operated by matriarchs, and in one case, the female leader had placed more than 20,000 sex ads. We will also look at victims who have been trafficked in the U.S. from India, Mexico, Philippines.

The presentation will cover successful methods of investigation by law enforcement, cultural considerations in dealing with foreign national trafficking and the role technology plays in recruitment and investigation. We examine the connection between Chinese sex and labor trafficking in the U.S and illegal pot grows. We will look a wide range of "drop houses" and indicators to look for in investigating buildings used for trafficking or housing undocumented individuals who are being threatened or violated. We will also explore the technologies that cartels use to recruit migrants as well as our teens to engage in illicit activities.

We will look at cases where tens of millions of dollars generated in multi-state sex trafficking rings were laundered through sophisticated money laundering processes involving small casinos and complex real estate investments.

Foreign national trafficking cases are generally large scale and require a level of manpower few law enforcement agencies can provide. However, by examining the anomalies and architecture of multiple trafficking cases, it can empower law enforcement to create multi-disciplinary teams that will facilitate joint investigations and create new avenues of assistance for victims that often do not trust law enforcement and fear for their families back home.

With open borders, and millions of individuals from foreign lands entering our country, it is critical that we acknowledge and understand this issue and prepare law enforcement, investigators, victim service providers and prosecutors to take on this significant challenge.

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### Jan 17 (Friday) from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm EST: Gangs and Sex Trafficking in New York City

- **Detective Liam O'Hara**, Human Trafficking Squad, Special Victims Division - Detective Bureau, New York City Police Department

Gang involvement with human trafficking has been on the rise as one of the fastest growing criminal operations in New York City. Gangs have moved past violence and other criminal enterprises to often concentrate on trafficking, which is more profitable, since unlike drugs or guns that account for only one sale per item, sex trafficking victims can be sold multiple times a day. Victims of sex trafficking are often forced or coerced into silence to ensure minimum detection and maximum profit. This workshop will discuss the ongoing connection between gangs and sex trafficking in New York City, and why it is so important for social services, law enforcement, criminal justice, and so many other providers to maintain a heightened awareness, to better recognize gang involvement with trafficking and in assessing and supporting victims.

### Jan 21 (Tuesday) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST: Keeping our Communities Safe Through Awareness and Prevention – HSI New York's Child Exploitation Investigations Team: Utilizing Technology and Investigative Techniques to Combat Sextortion, Trafficking, and other Sex Offenses on Social Media and the Dark Web

- **Joseph Brodsky**, Forensic Interview Specialist, Homeland Security Investigations
- **Richard Stepien**, Special Agent, Homeland Security Investigations,

The mission of the HSI NY Child Exploitation Investigations Team (CEIT) is to protect children from crimes of physical and online sexual abuse. The unique skillsets of the team allow HSI NY CEIT to employ cutting-edge investigative techniques to cases involving the dark web, cryptocurrency transactions, child sex tourism, social media applications facilitating online enticement of minors, and identifying administrators of sites that advertise and distribute child sexual abuse material (CSAM). HSI NY CEIT is continuously pursuing new ways to reveal the true identities of predators who attempt to maintain anonymity by utilizing social media applications and the dark web to victimize children through the production, live-streaming, distribution, and purchase of CSAM. In order to achieve a more victim-centric approach, HSI has deployed Forensic Interview Specialists (FIS) to all field offices. The HSI NY FIS is housed within the CEIT and serves both CEIT and the entire field office with victims of child exploitation and human trafficking. Learn about how CEIT's work has made a huge difference in protecting children and identifying predators.



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**Jan 22 (Wednesday) from 10:00 am to 11:30 pm EST:**

### **Survivor Voices: The "Here for You" Credible Messengers Program - Video and Panel**

- **Bishop Monique Ross**, ACS Credible Messenger
- **Ms. Nidia J. Melendez**, ACS Credible Messenger
- **Selina Higgins**, NYC Safe Harbour Coordinator/Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy (Moderator)

Credible Messengers are individuals who are able to connect with and motivate youth to successfully challenge and transform destructive thinking, attitudes, and actions. As the Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy (OCTPP) focuses upon the prevention of sexual and labor exploitation of youth under age 18, or over age 18 while in foster care, an adult, former foster youth and/or trafficking survivor who shares their story with youth can be highly influential. "Here for You" was developed to provide trafficked youth within the NYC child welfare system reluctant to leave the life or a risky environment with trauma-informed support by adult survivor leaders. Empathetic engagement by one who has faced and overcome similar challenges to live a healthy and safe life will help youth recognize: (1) that no matter what situation they are currently involved in, there is hope and many other possibilities available if they are willing to try, and (2) the benefit of a stable, supportive trafficking interventive placement. Through in-person, virtual, telephonic or text contacts between a youth and their assigned Messenger, a professional mentoring relationship will help provide sensitive support and dialogue opportunities that can positively enhance social-emotional development and safety decision-making.

OCTPP, which is also NYC's Safe Harbour Coordinator received NYS Office of Children and Family Services' Safe Harbour funding to sponsor a short film featuring (adult) former foster youth/trafficking survivors discussing child sex trafficking recruitment and disclosure. Topics include: (1) How no one ever expects to be recruited by an exploiter and what it feels like when one realizes that what you experienced was recruitment and not what you thought was a relationship, and (2) how incredibly difficult (but important) to disclose to someone else that you have been trafficked. The film has been developed to let youth know that they are not alone, that others have had the same difficult realizations and choices, and to model that it is okay to reach out for help (and explain where to obtain help). This workshop will feature a viewing of the film, followed by a panel discussion featuring our current Credible Messengers, Bishop Monique Ross and Ms. Nidia Melendez, who will talk about their experiences and respond to moderated questions typed into the Chat.

**Jan 22 (Wednesday) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST:**

### **The Lost Boys – Forgotten Victims of the Child Abuse Material Industry**

- **Nathan LaChine**, Founder, Evergreen Caregiver Support

This training is designed as an advanced level training for direct care staff and field staff working with Commercial Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) and trafficking survivors. We will be discussing aspects of the child pornography industry that are too often overlooked... boys: the forgotten victims.

We will hear the stories and voices of male youth survivors in this training on the commercialized aspects of the child pornography industry, enhance your knowledge base on trafficking, discuss myths & facts, current trends, and step inside the experiences of the forgotten victims themselves.



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### Jan 23 (Thursday) from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm EST: Safety Planning WITH Trafficked Youth

- **Dr. Ann Marie Pendleton, Psy.D.**, Clinical Director, Little Flower Children and Family Services
- **Jessie Boye-Doe, LCSW**, Vice President of Clinical and Mental Health Services, Good Shepherd Services
- **Selina Higgins, LCSW-R**, Executive Director, Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy

Safety plans are integral to optimizing safety at every stage for survivors of trafficking and youth at-risk of sexual exploitation. Planning should occur regularly, relate to whether the survivor plans to leave or remain with the trafficker, and address multiple criteria. Since youth are the experts of their situations and experiences, they should always have an opportunity to be engaged directly in safety-planning. This workshop will discuss the importance of safety planning WITH youth and provide strategies to encourage them to take ownership of and participate in the development of their own personalized plans. The workshop will suggest dos and don'ts, discuss short-term versus long-term planning, and provide strategies to engage youth who may be reluctant to participate in planning. It will also provide an opportunity to practice individualized plan development through case scenarios and role play opportunities.

### Jan 23 (Thursday) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST: Domestic Minor Labor Trafficking

- **Estelle Davis, Esq.**, Assistant Director, Bureau of Refugee Services, Human Trafficking Response, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

This workshop will give an overview of minor labor trafficking in New York State, including case scenarios from the last five years. We will also present on aspects of labor law governing minor workers, identifying minor labor trafficking, NYS areas of service for trafficked minors, and available resources.

### Jan 24 (Friday) from 11:00 am pm to 1:00 pm EST: Turning Trauma into Talent: The Journey to Empowerment in "The Academy": Film Premier from Foster Care Unplugged - Video and Discussion

- **Melody J. Centeno, LMSW**, Founder and CEO, Foster Care Unplugged (FCUP)

Join us for an engaging and transformative workshop centered around our latest film, The Academy. This workshop will dive into the powerful and symbolic storytelling of youth navigating the child welfare system while discovering that their perceived vulnerabilities are, in fact, their greatest strengths. The Academy tells the story of Rosario, the head of a residential boarding school, who covertly seeks out young individuals displaying signs of unique abilities. Through careful mentorship, Rosario helps these youth understand that their trauma holds the key to their superhuman talents, shifting the narrative from victimhood to empowerment. Raven, Rosario's protégé, embodies the doubts and struggles that many youths face in recognizing their worth and potential until pivotal moments unlock her true identity.

Key Themes to Explore:

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- **Understanding Identity and Resilience:** Reflect on how the characters' journeys symbolize the real-life resilience and adaptability of youth in the foster care system. For example, a character with mind-reading abilities symbolizes heightened awareness, essential for youth to navigate their environment safely.
- **Building Self-Awareness for Safety Planning:** Discuss how trauma-informed approaches, represented by the film's superpowers (e.g., foreseeing the future, mental withdrawal), can strengthen safety planning and decision-making for youth at risk of trafficking.
- **Creating Safe Spaces for Growth:** Highlight the importance of fostering environments that not only protect but empower young people, helping them reclaim their identity and sense of belonging despite past adversities.
- **Trauma as a Catalyst for Strength:** Engage in activities that connect participants to the film's underlying message: trauma does not solely represent pain but can be harnessed as a source of strength and talent to thrive and contribute to society.

Through this workshop, participants will gain insights into the complex realities of youth navigating foster care and human trafficking vulnerabilities, while exploring practical ways to support their growth and empowerment.

**Jan 27 (Monday) from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST:**

### **Law & Order NYC - From Arrest to Conviction: NYPD Human Trafficking Squad & District Attorney Human Trafficking Bureaus - Case Discussions**

#### **Law and Order - Brooklyn:**

- **Detective Courtney Thorpe**, NYPD/FBI Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force
- **ADA David Weiss, Esq.** Kings County District Attorney Human Trafficking Bureau Chief

#### **Law and Order - Manhattan:**

- **Detective Liam O'Hara**, NYPD Human Trafficking Squad
- **ADA Courtney Razner, Esq.** Deputy Chief of the Human Trafficking Unit, New York County District Attorney

#### **Law and Order - The Bronx:**

- **Detective Denis Regimbal**, NYPD/FBI Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation Task Force
- **ADA Stephen Knoepfler, Esq.** Chief of the Human Trafficking Unit, Special Victims Division, Bronx County District Attorney

#### **Law and Order - Queens:**

- **Detective Cynthia Oliva**, NYPD/ HSI Human Trafficking Task Force
- **ADA Jessica L. Melton, Esq.** Bureau Chief, Human Trafficking Bureau, Office of the District Attorney, Queens County

Case discussion and panel presentation on real NYC trafficking related media cases (information restricted to that which has been released in the press to protect confidentiality). There will be four 30-minute Detective/District Attorney pairings, starting with the investigation, then progressing to the trial and sentencing.

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Individual case related questions may be submitted in the Chat for response at the end of each segment. General questions may be submitted in the Chat for full panel discussion following the four case segments.

**Jan 30 (Thursday) from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm EST:**

### **NYC's Child Welfare Trafficking Policy and Screening Children for Sex Trafficking in ACS' Child Trafficking Database (CTDB)**

- **Selina Higgins, LCSW-R**, Executive Director, Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy
- **Clifton Robertson, LMSW**, Child Trafficking Specialist Residential Social Worker, Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy

In September 2020, ACS released Policy and Procedure 2020/05: Identifying, Assessing, and Safety Planning with Child Sex and Labor Trafficking Victims, which articulates guidelines and procedures for ACS and provider agency staff in identifying children and youth for sex and/or labor trafficking, and for safety planning, coordinating with law enforcement, and making referrals for appropriate services. The Child Trafficking Database (CTDB) is the electronic mechanism that all ACS and provider agency staff must use to screen children for sex trafficking. This training will provide an overview of child trafficking, a description of the legislation that led to mandated sex trafficking screenings for children in the NYS and NYC child welfare systems, a detailed overview of the policy and a step by step walk through of CTDB screening procedures, including a hands-on demonstration of CTDB screenings. This training is a must for all NYC child welfare staff and any other professional who needs to understand ACS' trafficking policy and to perform the screenings correctly.

**Jan 30 (Thursday) from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm EST:**

### **Post Traumatic Growth and Trauma Resolution**

- **Marti MacGibbon, CADC-II, ACRPS, CAPMS**, President of Mentari Human Trafficking Survivor Empowerment Program, Inc., Human Trafficking Expert Consultant at the US Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, and Expert Consultant at the US Office for Victims of Crime.

**January 30<sup>th</sup> is Marti's birthday, and an annual part of her celebration is to provide Human Trafficking presentations when given the opportunity. So come celebrate with Marti!**

Marti MacGibbon provides both clinical and experiential insights as she shares her unique expertise during this in-depth session in a way that only she can. Marti reveals her down-to earth personal recovery experience with candor and heartwarming humor to illustrate how trauma resolution in her own therapy set her on the path for post-traumatic growth. This session will discuss mindfulness practices, cognitive behavioral work, and cognitive reframing as tools for trauma resolution. Attendees will consider post-traumatic growth (PTG) within a bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework, and as a common and universal experience. So often, mental health



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professionals and service providers tend to focus on post-traumatic stress, while not embracing the opportunity to examine post-traumatic growth as both a process and an outcome. Benefits of PTG include seeing new possibilities, sparking positive changes in relationships, expanding coping tools and strategies, and deepening appreciation for life itself. During this two-hour workshop, Marti also explores secondary and vicarious PTG in a refreshing new light.

“PTG can be experienced by an increased sense of self-reliance, a sense of strength and confidence, and a perception of self as survivor or victor rather than victim.” (Shakespeare, Finch, and Barrington, 2012.)

Upon completion of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Explain how PTG is not the opposite of PTSD
- List examples of mindfulness practices as tools for managing trauma and PTSD
- Verbalize the impact of trauma on individuals with substance use issues and vice versa, and how trauma resolution and SUD recovery work together toward long-term positive outcomes for individuals and society
- Describe at least one scenario in which behavioral health professionals can facilitate post-traumatic growth and trauma resolution
- Acquire narrative skills and terms related to PTG (ex: stress-related growth)

**Jan 31 (Friday) from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm EST:**

### **Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): What You NEED To Know**

- **Danny Salim**, Deputy Director for Solution Based Casework, Arab-American Family Support Center
- **Dr. Mariama Diallo**, LCSW, DSW, Clinical Director, Midway Living

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injuries to the female genital organs for NON-MEDICAL REASONS. FGM is a violation of Human Rights and part of a continuum of gender-based violence. This training will discuss the types of FGM, tools used, false assumptions, highest risk cities, and physical and psychological consequences. It will also focus upon cultural awareness and effective strategies (Dos and Don'ts) to use in preventive engagement with families and in sensitive engagement with survivors. It will also highlight ACS' [FGM@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:FGM@acs.nyc.gov) e-mailbox where child welfare professions can obtain information, case guidance and resources from ACS' Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy.



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### Presenter Bios:

Bios provided by presenters have been listed alphabetically by first name.

**Alyssa Harrilal, Survivor Expert** A 30-year-old entrepreneur from Long Island, NY, Alyssa is a dedicated mother of two and a resilient survivor. Her personal journey has fueled her passion for community advocacy and awareness, as she works to bring support and resources to those in need. Driven by her experiences, Alyssa is committed to bridging gaps by providing access to the critical resources she lacked during her own challenges. Above all, she strives to protect and empower children, ensuring they are safeguarded from hardships similar to those she has overcome.

**Dr. Ann Marie Pendleton, Psy.D.** is a New York State Licensed Psychologist and Clinical Director at Little Flower Children and Family Services. She has worked in the NYS Care/Child Welfare setting since 2007 and specializes in trauma-informed evidence-based practices with a particular emphasis on partnering with children and families. Her training includes: Trauma-Focused CBT, The Sanctuary Model, Trauma-Focused Therapy, Play Therapy, CBT+, EMDR and PCIT.

In 2008, Dr. Pendleton obtained her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Minnesota School of Professional Psychology. She obtained a B.A. in Music and Psychology from Gonzaga University in 2003. Over the past 15 years, Dr. Pendleton has worked in and collaborated with multiple settings including residential centers, outpatient clinics, foster care, private practice, schools, law enforcement, hospitals, and nanny agencies. She has participated closely with the Office of Children and Family Services and NYS Department of Health surrounding practices and policies around children's Medicaid initiatives. Dr. Pendleton is a liaison with the New York State Office of Mental Health, and with the Administration for Children's Services' Mental Health Coordination Unit, Complex Case Committee, and Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy.

**Brittany Butler** is a Resource Specialist with the Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Services Team (RST) at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). RST is a team of regionally assigned Resource Specialists who support child welfare professionals when they report a child missing from care to NCMEC who is suspected or confirmed to be a victim of child sex trafficking. RST provides resources and troubleshooting around safety planning, youth engagement, trauma-informed recovery planning, and connection to specialized resources for child sex trafficking survivors.

Brittany has eight years of experience and an expertise in the topics of domestic violence, child abuse, and human trafficking. Brittany's focus has always been on uniquely vulnerable populations, and she passionately advocates for those that she serves. Her educational background includes an undergraduate psychology degree from the University of Virginia, and a master's degree in forensic psychology from Marymount University. Throughout her career, Brittany has served survivor populations in Northern Virginia, Atlanta, New York City, and Baltimore. Presently, in her role as Resource Specialist, Brittany has been able to broaden her impact by supporting child sex trafficking survivors and child welfare professionals across the Northeast (10 states and Washington, DC).

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**Carmen Sanchez, LCSW** is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who holds a Master's Degree in Clinical Social Worker from Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Work with an emphasis on working with Children and Families. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a Minor in Art Therapy at The College of New Rochelle.

Carmen has 20 years of experience working with Children and Families in various capacities including Child Welfare, Mental Health, and Staff Development. In addition, to working directly with families in the Child Welfare and Mental Health systems, Carmen has worked directly with child welfare staff delivering trainings to assist in providing trauma-focused and client centered material that will help service providers under the needs of children who have been abused and maltreated. Trainings include, but are not limited to: Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Creative Arts Therapy, Mandated Reported Training, MAPP: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting, Shaken Baby Syndrome, and Caring for our Own: Training for Kinship Caregivers.

**Casey Jones** is an Outreach Manager at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) Headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. She began her journey with NCMEC as an intern in 2019 and progressed to a Call Center Specialist role for two years before joining the Outreach team in 2021. Casey holds a BA in Human Development and Family Studies, with a concentration in Research, Policy, and Advocacy from George Mason University. A seasoned presenter, Casey has dedicated her career to advocating for children across the nation.

Casey's commitment to her work is deeply personal, having experienced the Social Services system firsthand as a child. This unique perspective drives her passion and effectiveness in her current role, where she collaborates with law enforcement, communities, and children to recognize, address, and prevent issues related to NCMEC's mission."

**Clifton Robertson, LMSW** is the Residential Child Trafficking Specialist with the ACS Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the State University of New York College at Old Westbury, and a Master of Social Work degree from Adelphi University. He is accredited as a Licensed Master Social Worker. As the Residential Child Trafficking Specialist, Clifton is the point person for the residential, group home, and foster care staff that support and provide services to trafficked youth and youth at-risk for trafficking. He also works directly with vulnerable youth, providing psychoeducational awareness, groupwork sessions which includes Dialectic Behavioral Therapy, Creative Arts in Psychotherapy, and Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and a variety of prevention strategies individualized as per each child's needs and strengths. In addition, he provides support, guidance, and training to NYC child welfare stakeholders. Clifton has over a decade of cumulative experience in the fields of mental health, developmentally disabled and other vulnerable populations.

**Assistant District Attorney Courtney Razner, JD** is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Harvard Law School. Courtney joined the New York County District Attorney's Office in 2014, where she has focused on investigating and prosecuting crimes of violence, homicides, sexual assaults, and human trafficking. In November 2022, Courtney was appointed Deputy Chief of the Human Trafficking Unit.

**Detective First Grade Courtney Thorpe**, a first-generation law enforcement officer, has dedicated his career to serving the NYPD and working endlessly to identify and arrest suspects for sex trafficking and other related crimes. Since joining the New York City Police Department in 2005, he has risen through the ranks, excelling in roles such as Housing IRT, Housing Patrol, Brooklyn North Narcotics, Brooklyn North VICE, Special Victims Human Trafficking Squad and now the NYPD/FBI Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force. His exceptional leadership and investigative skills have contributed to the successful resolution of numerous high-

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profile cases. A 2023 recipient of the Finest Foundation Award for his excellence in case work. Detective Thorpe was promoted to NYPD's highest Detective designation of First Grade on August 30th, 2024. Beyond his law enforcement career, Detective Thorpe is a proud father, a husband and an avid Knicks Fan.

**Crystal Chen, ATR-BC, LCAT, LMHC** is a board-certified art therapist working at Eastside Counseling Center. Crystal Chen provides bilingual art therapy for individuals and groups that have behavior disorders, experienced trauma, or struggle with eating disorders. In addition, Crystal provides supervision for creative arts therapists. She is a women's rights advocate, having spoken at two United Nations NGO CSW conferences, at the 4th World Conference of Women's Shelter in Taiwan, and is a Pratt Taconic Fellow. With her Pratt Taconic Fellowship, she developed an art therapy program, known as Garden of Gems, a project that combines art therapy with jewelry making to provide a sense of community and economic empowerment for women at Garden of Hope.

**Detective Cynthia Oliva** was appointed to the New York City Police Department in July 2011, has over 13 years of service & over 230 arrests made. In January 2012, Detective Oliva started her career in the 115th Precinct as part of Operation Impact. Upon completion of Operation Impact, she was transferred to the 104th Precinct, where she worked for 8 years. During her time in the 104th Precinct, she spent 6 years as part of the Special Operations Unit serving in the Conditions & Anti-Crime teams. In 2020, Detective Oliva was transferred to PBQN Borough Crime Unit. In March of 2022, she applied and was transferred to the Detective Bureau, Brooklyn Robbery Squad where she successfully closed numerous cases & patterns. A particular pattern of significance was a Smoke Shop robbery pattern between Brooklyn & Manhattan that made the news in which Detective Oliva apprehended the main suspect who remains in custody.

In February 2023, Detective Oliva was transferred to the Special Victims Division - Major Case Human Trafficking Unit & was promoted to the rank of Detective on September 2023. During this time, she actively investigated, provided services, and performed as an advocate for young men and women victims of sexual violence who believed they did not have a voice.

Det. Oliva has studied Spanish-English Legal Translation and Interpretation at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and is also a certified Spanish Translator with the NYPD. This has helped her create unbreakable ties between the Spanish speaking community and the Police Department. For Detective Oliva, it has been advantageous to be a Hispanic speaking Spanish working in the Human Trafficking Unit as she is able to communicate with the Spanish speaking victims, making them feel comfortable and understood. She was born and raised in Lima-Peru. She came to NYC when she was 17 years old and resided in Jackson Heights Queens for several years.

**Danny Salim** is the Deputy Director of Solution Based Casework at the Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC). Danny holds a Master's degree in Conflict Transformation from Eastern Mennonite University. He has vast experience in restorative justice, trauma healing and resilience, healing circles processes, women and youth empowerment, human rights, and culturally sensitive programming. Danny serves on several task forces and committees and leads the restorative justice work and cultural competency trainings for community-based organizations and government partners. He is passionate about examining sociopolitical experiences and systems that foster community development policy practice with a trauma-informed framework. Prior to joining AAFSC, Danny worked at several national and international organizations including Non-Violent Peace-Force and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). While at UNDP, he designed and developed the Conflict Prevention Community of Practice Team Works Platform (CP-CoP), an interactive forum for dialogue.

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**David Weiss, JD** is the Chief of the Human Trafficking Unit at the Kings County District Attorney's Office and is also the law enforcement lead for the US Department of Justice-funded Enhanced Collaborative Model, Brooklyn Human Trafficking Task Force. David began his career in 2006 handling cases involving all types of violent crime. He has been investigating and prosecuting Human Trafficking cases since 2014.

David has prosecuted numerous violent traffickers for exploiting children and adults and has led a multi-agency investigation and prosecution resulting in the takedown and closure of two hotels and the arrests of the owners for permitting prostitution at their hotels in Brooklyn and Queens. In 2017, David was cross-designated as a Special Assistant United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, to bring federal sex trafficking charges in a case involving the trafficking of several underage girls. David regularly presents on Human Trafficking investigations and prosecutions throughout NY State, around the United States and for international law enforcement officials, focusing on evidence-based prosecutions, prosecuting without a victim, and prosecuting in a true victim-centered manner. David recently testified before the NYS Assembly as a subject matter expert discussing the need to expand the Statute of Limitations on Human Trafficking case to account for trauma and delayed disclosure and was the recipient of the 2024 Homeland Security Investigations NY Field Office Prosecutor of the year award.

**Detective Denis Regimbal** is a 13-year member of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). He joined the NYPD in 2011 and began his career at the 44th Precinct in the Bronx, where he served in various roles across patrol, conditions, and Neighborhood Coordination Officer (NCO) assignments. In 2017, Detective Regimbal transitioned to the Vice Enforcement Unit within the Detective Bureau, focusing on investigating crimes related to gambling, prostitution, and human trafficking. His experience in Vice led to a 2021 assignment to the Vice Major Case Squad, and in 2022, he joined the Citywide Human Trafficking Squad. Detective Regimbal is currently assigned to the joint NYPD/FBI Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation Task Force.

Throughout his career, Detective Regimbal has conducted hundreds of human trafficking investigations, many of which have led to the recovery of minor victims and the arrest and indictment of over 50 individuals involved in trafficking related crimes. His work has centered around complex, long-term undercover operations targeting trafficking rings, as well as short-term investigations aimed at rescuing victims, connecting them with essential support services, and dismantling trafficking networks. His work in these investigations has earned him multiple awards and recognition.

Detective Regimbal has extensive experience in the analysis of digital evidence, securing hundreds of search warrants to access electronic data vital to human trafficking prosecutions. This experience has played a crucial role in exposing trafficking operations and bringing perpetrators to justice. He has also undergone extensive training in human trafficking, special victims, and interview techniques to ensure the highest level of proficiency in his investigations. He holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

**Estelle Davis, JD** is an experienced attorney in immigration and labor law, and their intersection in labor trafficking. She runs the Response to Human Trafficking Program at the NYS Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, implementing state anti-trafficking legislation and working with non-profits statewide to ensure social and legal services for survivors. Estelle previously supervised anti-labor trafficking initiatives at the NYS Department of Labor as Counsel to the Division of Immigrant Policies and Affairs. Estelle specializes in ensuring anti-trafficking services are trauma-informed and victim-centered. She grounds her practice in



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respecting individual choices while recognizing that available options are rooted in underlying systemic issues. Estelle has worked for over 20 years in government, legal services and community-based organizations.

She is adept at supporting and mentoring staff while ensuring ethical and programmatic goals are met. She has trained workers, organizers, attorneys, judges, and law enforcement in English and Spanish. She received her J.D. from the City University of New York School of Law and is admitted to practice law in New York.

**Feride Castillo** is the Co-founder of Empowerment Collaborative of Long Island (ECLI) and currently serves as the Program Development & Education Director at ECLI-VIBES. With over a decade of experience, she has dedicated her career to empowering survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, and supporting at-risk, court-involved youth and women.

In 2017, ECLI co-founded the Suffolk County Anti-Trafficking Initiative (SCATI) alongside the Suffolk County Police Department, uniting governmental bodies, NGOs, and community stakeholders to create a coordinated response to trafficking. Under Ms. Castillo's leadership, SCATI addresses the complex needs of trafficking survivors while promoting outreach and education.

Through her work at ECLI-VIBES, Ms. Castillo continues to lead programming and training that support survivors and at-risk populations, using her vast knowledge and passion to create systemic change in the community.

**Judge Fernando Camacho** obtained his undergraduate degree from Columbia College and attended Fordham Law School where he graduated in 1985. He then joined the Manhattan District Attorney's Office where he worked in the Trial Division, the Sex Crimes Unit and the Homicide Unit. In 1991, he was assigned to the Homicide Investigation Unit, a joint state and federal task force, where he directed long term investigations and prosecutions of violent gangs. In 1997, he became a New York City Criminal Court Judge and began his judicial career in Brooklyn. In 2002, he was assigned to Queens County where he served as the Deputy Supervising Judge and presided over the Domestic Violence Court. In 2003, he created a specialized court with a mission to stop the incarceration of young people charged with prostitution. In 2008, he was appointed to the New York State Court of Claims and served in the Integrated Domestic Violence Court in Queens County Supreme Court. In 2009, he was promoted to County Administrative Judge for Criminal Matters.

While serving as administrative judge he also created the Supreme Court Youth Diversion Part, a specialized treatment court for adolescents charged with felony offenses. In January 2013, he was assigned to Suffolk County Supreme Court where he started the Suffolk County Felony Youth Part, which provides alternatives to incarceration for young people charged with felonies. In January 2021, he started the Suffolk County CONCEPTS Court which provides alternatives to residential placement for youth charged as Juvenile Delinquents in Family Court.

Over the last fifteen years Judge Camacho has frequently advocated for the enactment of legislation to protect sex trafficked-youth. He has spoken at numerous state and national training seminars on the topics of juvenile justice, human trafficking, sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of youth.

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**Jacqueline (Jackie) Gavette** is a Case Manager with the Missing Children's Division Critical Risk Unit at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. She is responsible for managing a case load of 100+ cases at any given time. She is tasked with the handling of leads and intake information as assigned by Missing Children Division Leadership. Working from these leads and information she is able to analyze, collate and disseminate information concerning missing and exploited children to the appropriate investigative agencies. Her role as a Case Manager includes providing after-hours assistance as well as on-call hours as assigned. She also provides reunification and post-recovery support to families in a timely and professional manner and assess each individual case for criticality and high-risk patterns.

Jackie joined NCMEC in August 2022 and brings over 9 years' experience working inside the school districts from Administration to Security. She is deeply committed to the safety and welfare of the community and has a wealth of knowledge providing technical assistance to parents, police and other authorized agencies as well as establishing and maintaining close working relationships with her peers. She has the ability to manage, prioritize and complete numerous tasks in a fast paced environment under tight deadlines and holds herself to a high degree of accountability.

**Assistant District Attorney Jessica L. Melton, JD** graduated from St. John's University School of Law, cum laude, in 2000. She serves as the Chief of the Human Trafficking Bureau of the Queens County District Attorney's Office which was established in May of 2020 by District Attorney Melinda Katz. Jessica Melton has been a prosecutor with the District Attorney's Office for the past twenty-four years. Since 2007, when New York State's first Sex and Labor Trafficking laws took effect, she has focused her career solely on the prosecution Human Trafficking and related crimes and advocated for the creation of a specialized Human Trafficking Unit which she led. Most notably, she was the first prosecutor to obtain a conviction for Sex Trafficking in a New York State Court. Additionally, in 2017 she obtained the first four Labor Trafficking convictions in Queens County. In 2013, she was awarded the prestigious Thomas E. Dewey medal by the New York City Bar Association for her work in combating Human Trafficking, as well as being awarded the 2023 Freedom Award from Lifeway Network.

Since the implementation of New York's Human Trafficking Statutes, ADA Melton has developed innovative approaches to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses that are centered on the victims of these demoralizing and demeaning crimes. Through the Human Trafficking Bureau, she ensures that trafficking victim who come into contact with the criminal justice system at any time of the day or night are responded to. She has been consulted on and participated in advocating for improvements and amendments to New York State's trafficking laws which were successfully amended in 2016 and again in 2018 to strengthen the law and enhance the penalties for trafficking, promoting and patronizing persons for prostitution.

Chief Melton shares her expertise around Human Trafficking by lecturing and conducting training for the New York City Police Department, New York State Prosecutor's Training Institute, the District Attorney's Association of New York, and for numerous City and State Agencies about in techniques to improve trafficking prosecutions and the collective response to human trafficking survivors. In addition to investigating and prosecuting trafficking crimes, ADA Melton also works to combat trafficking by collaborating with numerous city, state, and non-governmental organizations and agencies to facilitate services for trafficking survivors. More recently, in addition to training and

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lecturing, ADA Melton has made additional efforts to combat human trafficking and advocating for preventative outreach programs aimed at the identification and prevention of trafficking. Specifically, she has developed trainings for the public to identify trafficking situations and target education for vulnerable children and members of our community who are most at risk to traffickers.

**Jessie Boye-Doe, LCSW** is the Vice President of Clinical and Mental Health Services at Good Shepherd Services in New York City where she leads the agency's mental health initiatives and the Trauma Informed Practice team. A strong advocate for quality mental health care for all, Ms. Boye-Doe was formerly the Director of JCCA's Outpatient Behavioral Health and Center for Healing.

A clinical expert and leader in the field of mental health treatment, Ms. Boye-Doe has supervised and trained hundreds of clinicians who, in turn, have gone on to provide care for children in NYC who are. In addition to her therapy and advocacy on behalf of young people, Ms. Boye-Doe has helped various agencies become more trauma informed for both their staff, and participants. She has also developed cutting-edge clinical approaches to working with victims of trafficking, translating her comprehensive clinical expertise into modalities that address the underlying issues that make young people vulnerable to commercial exploitation. She has created training series that not only teach providers how to deliver innovative and trauma-informed mental health care, but also to prevent, identify, and treat child sexual abuse and exploitation. Ms. Boye-Doe also created workshops for young people, to help them identify the warning signs of sexual abuse and to address the issues that make them vulnerable to trafficking. In the past, Ms. Boye-Doe was the Director of the Child Sexual Abuse Response Team at the Child Guidance Center of Southern Connecticut, which is a nationally accredited child advocacy center. She was also a Victim Advocate at the Office of Victim Services in Stamford, CT and provided crisis and long-term counseling at the Kings County District Attorney's Office, where she developed, launched and ran the African Immigrant Victims of Violence Program. Ms. Boye-Doe earned her BA from Baruch College and her MSW from the Columbia School of Social Work.

**Joseph Brodsky, LMSW** is the Forensic Interview Specialist for Homeland Security Investigations in New York, NY (HSI NY). Joseph is assigned to the Child Exploitation and Investigations Team, however he serves all teams and offices HSI NY offices and teams which are located in Manhattan, Queens, Long Island, and Hudson Valley. Prior to his federal appointment, Joseph was a forensic interviewer with the Brooklyn Child Advocacy Center where he worked alongside the New York City Police Department's Special Victims Unit. Joseph holds a Bachelor of Psychology from Brandeis University and a master's degree in Social Work from Yeshiva University.

**Kimberly (Kim) Parks-Bourn** is the Program Manager for Children Missing from Care at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. She is responsible for working with all 50 states to implement federal policy requiring child welfare to report missing children and youth to NCMEC. Her work entails identifying and problem-solving cross-system pain points to improve serving children missing from care. She joined NCMEC in July, 2023 and brings with her over 28 years of experience as a frontline social worker, clinician, trainer, clinical supervisor as well as an administrator in the child welfare and mental health systems in the State of Maryland. Kim has served numerous children, adolescents, and families throughout her career ranging in these capacities. She also has experience in developing and monitoring legislation as well as assessing needs and strategic planning.



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She was most recently the Deputy Executive Director for Permanency and Placement Services with the Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration in Baltimore, MD. Her two other recent positions were Director for Protection, Preservation and Prevention Services as well as Program Manager for Practice Innovations. The latter position she held was responsible for developing, implementing and training a new practice model in Child Welfare in Maryland.

**Detective Liam O'Hara** is a graduate of Binghamton University. He graduated in 2008 and joined the New York City Police Department a few months later. Detective O'Hara began his career in Harlem and Washington Heights. He has worked Patrol and Street Narcotics in the 25th Precinct in East Harlem, before earning his detective's shield in the Manhattan North Gang Squad. While at the Gang Squad, he was first introduced to human trafficking investigations. After first working alongside the Human Trafficking Squad, he was given the opportunity to join the team and exclusively work trafficking investigations. Since becoming a member of the

Human Trafficking Squad, Detective O'Hara has worked with each of the City's five District Attorney's Offices, the NY Attorney General's Office, the Eastern and Southern Districts of NY, the FBI, HSI, and more to investigate, indict, arrest, and convict perpetrators of sex trafficking, child sex trafficking, and child (sexual) exploitation.

**Dr. Mariama Diallo**, a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) based in New York is the Clinical Director at Midway Living. She received her Master of Science in Social Work (MSW) from Columbia University, and her DSW from Rutgers University. Currently, Dr. Diallo is an Adjunct Professor at Hunter College (NYC) and at The Montclair State University, in New Jersey. Dr. Diallo has over 20 years of experience in the field of gender-based violence, including Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), Intimate Partner Violence, Early and Forced Marriage. Dr. Diallo provides trauma-informed individual and group therapy to survivors of gender-based violence. She has extensive experience in federal and State Advocacy for policy changes on behalf of survivors of FGM/C, which involved working closely with the U.S House of Representatives in connection with the "Girls Protection Act" that was signed into law by President Obama in 2013. In addition, Dr. Diallo worked closely with New York State Assembly woman, Amy Paulin in connection with State laws that protect victims of gender-based violence.

Dr. Diallo conducts research studies and develops curricula and other training materials; provides expert knowledge and testify in courts in the area of FGM/C, forced marriage, and domestic violence. She facilitates a leadership group training for African girls' survivors or at risk of experiencing gender violence. Dr. Diallo is the founder and Chair of the New York Coalition to end FGM/C; a member of the NYC Mayor's Office Advisory Board on FGM/C, where she is co-chairing the subcommittee on training and education; a recipient of the Global Woman Award from P.E.A.C.E Foundation in 2022; a member of the UN working group on Girls. Dr. Diallo was born in Guinea, and she started her career at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Department of Universal Values in Paris.

**Marti MacGibbon, CADC-II, ACRPS, CAPMS** is an internationally known author and an expert on trauma resolution and addiction. She's a humorous inspirational speaker, and a mental health professional who holds five professional certifications in addiction treatment. Marti is a Human Trafficking Expert Consultant to the US Dept. of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, and is an Expert Consultant to the US Office for Victims of Crime. She is co-author of the widely cited article published in the American Medical Association Journal of Ethics, Human Trafficking, Mental Illness, and Addiction: Avoiding Diagnostic

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Overshadowing (2017), and is a contributing author of the Springer Nature 2020 textbook, Medical Perspectives on Human Trafficking in Adolescents: A Case-Based Guide.

Few speakers have a personal comeback story as riveting and inspirational as Marti's. She has recovered from and triumphed over nightmare experiences such as being trafficked to Tokyo and held prisoner by Japanese organized crime, homelessness, domestic violence, childhood sexual assault/abuse, severe PTSD and hard-core drug addiction. Marti employed simple, effective strategies to transform her life, and shares them to motivate, encourage, and energize listeners to create positive changes in every area of their lives. In addition to speaking to businesses, medical professionals and mental health professionals on overcoming adversity, empowerment, addiction recovery, and inspiration, Marti speaks on human trafficking, domestic violence, and other violence against women, and trains service providers. She has spoken at The 2023 United Nations World Day Against Trafficking in Persons Event (organized by UN Women), The 2021 UN Commission on the Status of Women, The Museum of Tolerance, The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, at colleges and universities, and even from the center of an MMA octagon at, "Fight Traffick," an anti-human trafficking cage-fighting event. She's been interviewed in Investor's Business Daily, Entrepreneur, and Glamour, on ABC-TV, CBS-TV, FOX-TV and numerous radio stations, and articles she wrote have appeared in over 150 corporate and trade magazines.

An advocate for victims and survivors, in 2015, Marti spoke at the White House, the State Department, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Office for Victims of Crime, on mental health and policy advocacy. From 2012-2017, Ms. MacGibbon served on the Indiana Attorney General's state-wide anti-trafficking task force IPATH, Indiana Protection for Abused and Trafficked Humans. From 2013-2017, she developed curriculum for and taught a life skills class for women with trauma history in Marion County Jail. In 2014, she spoke to California State Legislature in support of new and successful legislation aimed at eradicating child sex trafficking.

Marti is an engaged leader who served for two years on the Board of Directors at HEAL Trafficking, Inc. She currently serves as President of MENTARI Human Trafficking Survivor Empowerment Program in NY, NY, and on the Advisory Board at Justice At Last in San Francisco. Marti is a Speaker Trainer Consultant at the National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Center.

From 2011 to 2019, Marti was founder, producer, and emcee of Laff-Aholics Standup Comedy Benefit for Recovery, an annual charity fundraiser in Indianapolis that features nationally headlining comedians. One hundred percent of the profits from the show went to transitional housing facilities in Indy that provide access to addiction treatment and mental health services for the recovery community's most vulnerable.

The Indiana Addictions Issues Coalition (IAIC) honored Marti with the 2015 Indiana Lifetime Recovery Advocate Award, and the 2014 Recovery Advocate of the Year Award, for outstanding accomplishments in support of recovery, and her work in breaking away the stigma surrounding addiction, mental illness, and human trafficking.

Marti has performed at the world-famous Hollywood Improv and at the Comedy Store in Hollywood, and has traveled the U.S. as a professional standup comic. She is a member of the National Speakers Association, the Behavioral Health Association of Providers, the California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals (CCAPP), and the Indiana Counselor's Association on Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

Marti MacGibbon is author of two award-winning and critically acclaimed memoirs, Never Give in to Fear: Laughing All the Way Up from Rock Bottom and, Fierce, Funny, and Female. Fierce, Funny, and Female, Marti's recent memoir, is winner of the Beverly Hills International Book Award, in Women's Issues, and winner of the National Indie Excellence Awards, in Women's Health. It is the winner of the 2018 Independent Press

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Award, in Humor and Women's Studies. In June 2018, the book was announced winner of the Foreword Book of the Year Awards, in both Humor and Women's Studies.

**Melody Joanne Centeno, LMSW** is a remarkable individual who wears many hats. Not only is she a motivational speaker, public advocate, and psychodrama practitioner, but she's also an ABA therapist, talk show host, actress, film director, film editor, and producer.

Melody's passion for helping others led her to graduate from Adelphi University's School of Social Work, where she is recognized as a NYS Licensed Master Social Worker approved by the State Association of Social Work Boards. She now shares her expertise as an Adjunct Professor at Adelphi University's Field Education department, where she supervises undergraduate and graduate social work students. She also uses her SIFI certification and platform to supervise students at New York University.

As a former foster youth herself, Melody founded Foster Care Unplugged in 2016 with the goal of enriching the lives of children in care through the development of positive resiliency skills. Her personal experience has

driven her to share her story around the world, empowering youth and enlightening professionals in the field about the importance of being culturally responsive within the culture of child welfare.

Melody's unique style of leadership is a result of her ability to model and teach through the lens of personal experience, merged with professional practice. Her passion for helping others, combined with her expertise and experience, make her an invaluable asset to the Foster Care Unplugged team and to the children and families they serve.

Melody Joanne Centeno, also known as "the Plug," is a role model to many and has made a lasting impression on those who have had the privilege of working with her. She is highly esteemed for her leadership qualities, ability to motivate, and her dedication to improving the lives of those around her.

Melody's goal is to inspire and educate individuals to become their best selves. She uses her platform as a motivational speaker, public advocate, and psychodrama practitioner to stimulate minds, stir hearts, and activate the will within people to achieve greatness.

When she is not working on community projects, Melody devotes her free time to developing her skills as an aspiring actress. Her daughter, Savannah Arielle Acree, is her greatest motivation in life, and she hopes to serve as a blueprint for her daughter and for other young people who look up to her as a role model.

Melody has an impressive portfolio of producing youth-focused projects that aim to empower and inspire young people. One of her notable projects is "Foster Care Unplugged: The Stage Play," which highlights the experiences of current and former foster care youth through theatrical performances. She has also produced short films featuring foster care youth, which shed light on their unique struggles and triumphs.

Foster Care Unplugged is not only dedicated to producing creative projects, but also to hosting annual events that foster a sense of community among young people. These events include a toy drive, a fashion show, and a basketball game with the NYPD.

Melody's dedication to supporting foster youth has expanded to include those who are at risk of being human trafficked. She co-created and facilitated the grant-funded "Mitigating Trauma Through Drama" group therapy model, which combines psychodrama techniques with human trafficking awareness to help mitigate the impact of trauma on young people's lives. Through her work, Melody has become a beacon of hope for many foster youth and vulnerable populations, providing them with the tools and support they need to thrive.

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**Monique Ross**, Founder and Bishop of Predestined for Purpose Ministries is a dynamic preacher and teacher of the word of God. Bishop Ross has been preaching and teaching the Word of God for over 15 years to the masses. Having answered the call to Pastor in 2010, while under the leadership of Apostle Violet Wallace. Bishop Ross established the “Women of Power Outreach Ministry” geared towards the empowerment of young women through mentorship. In addition, she formed the “Dunamis Praise Dancers” a powerful praise dance team.

Growing in her love for the word, prayer, and deliverance, in 2014 she heeded the call of the Holy Spirit and launched Predestined for Purpose Ministries in Yonkers, New York. The foundation of Predestined for Purpose Ministries is to propel hearts to destiny through prayer, deliverance, and teaching of the unadulterated word of God. Predestined for Purpose Ministries focuses on developing the people of God to walk in their purpose and fulfill their destiny according to God’s predetermined will. To fulfill this mission Bishop Ross facilitates classes on prophetic and biblical training.

Since then, Bishop Ross has established an extension of “PFP” in the Cayman Islands (2017) and in Charlotte, North Carolina (2021). On July 10, 2021, Monique Ross was elevated to “Overseer” and in 2024 to the office of the Bishop by Archbishop Elect Keith Wright Sr. and the Liberty Pentecostal Fellowship. Bishop Ross earned her Bachelor of Arts in Christian Studies with an Emphasis on Biblical Studies at Grand Canyon University and is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Christian Leadership. She is honored to be the mother of two wonderful children, Annora and Elisha Fearon. Bishop Ross aspires to not only accomplish the will and purpose of God on earth, but to leave a legacy for her children. Bishop Ross leaves an indelible impression upon the hearts of the people she encounters because of her passion to witness souls be healed, set free, and delivered.

**Nathan LaChine** is a Therapeutic Foster Parent for the last 18 years, specializing in early childhood traumas. Nathan’s current role as Board of Director and Webmaster for MaleSurvivor involves the oversight of the volunteer staff along with the daily operations of the site which sees over 100,000 visitors and 2.5 million pages views annually. Nathan cohosted a local radio show “Real Family Matters,” a live resource show for community members to call in and ask questions.

Nathan is currently a Therapeutic Foster Parent and Community Educator providing trainings and resources for Caregivers in Washington state. He is also a community activist for foster parents and youth in care here in Washington State, Board of Director for MaleSurvivor.org and Region 5 1624 Rep. Publish author and speaker and trainer on wide range of topics. “Be the change you want to see in this world”, these are the words that have influenced his life the most. In addition to being a foster parent, he administers the largest Facebook group (We Foster Washington) of Potential Caregivers in the state. Nathan and his husband co-founded Evergreen Caregiver Support which provides trainings and resources for Caregivers statewide. Through his various professional roles have launched support groups, facilitated countless trainings, spoken to legislators at the capital, podcasts, and interviews on local and state bills.

**Nidia J. Melendez** is a trafficking overcomer who uses her experiences to inspire change and raise awareness in the fight against human trafficking. She works as a case manager at New York Presbyterian, providing compassionate support to youth navigating challenging circumstances. In addition to her professional and advocacy efforts, Nidia is actively involved in women’s ministries at her church, where she empowers others to



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find healing and hope. Her faith and dedication to justice and service continues to shape her impactful work in the community.

**Opal Singleton Hendershot** is the President and CEO of Million Kids, a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to keeping kids safe from predators. She is one of the leading voices for combating human trafficking, social media exploitation and the impact of advanced technologies on child sex crimes.

Million Kids serves as the Training and Outreach Coordinator for the Riverside County Anti Human Trafficking Task Force (RCAHT) and works with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department through a Department of Justice Grant. Opal has completed tens of thousands of hours of research over the past ten years on those subjects and dealt with real cases making her an expert on human trafficking crimes and online social media exploitation of minors.

With her expertise, Opal has educated and trained more than 500,000 government and individual leaders as the keynote speaker and workshop presenter on labor trafficking, adult and child sex trafficking, foreign national trafficking, gang trafficking, advanced technologies used in sex crimes, sextortion and social media exploitation, crypto currency and money laundering, the Dark Net and bulletproof hosting, and CSAM (child sexual abuse materials). She often appears on television and radio talk shows across the United States. Opal is the author of two books. *Seduced: The Grooming of America's Teenagers* (2015) examines real cases to illustrate how predators use social media and online gaming to access, groom, recruit and exploit teenagers into sex trafficking, sextortion and exploitation. The second book, *Societal Shift: A World Without Borders... A Home Without Walls* (2019), takes a look at the impact of over six billion people coming together in ways never before experienced creating a momentous societal shift. Researchers say that 87% of teens sleep with their phone. A world without borders for our children is also a world without borders for pedophiles, predators, pimps, cartels and other organized criminals. That means while you are sleeping bad guys can access your children.

Opal is a lecturer and subject matter expert for the National Education Safety and Security Initiative in UCLA'S Center for Public Health and Disasters. Opal is also an Instructor at USC Price Safe Communities Institute and former co-instructor at the USC School of Social Work for the Los Angeles Police Department LEAD program and is an instructor at Los Angeles Fire Leadership Training Academy. Opal has completed the Robert Presley Institute of Criminal Investigation Instructor Course and served on the Peace Officers Standardized Training panel to develop the training curriculum on human trafficking for law enforcement in California.

Opal hosts a radio show on KTIE 590 AM called "Exploited: Crimes and Technology" every Saturday at 3:00 PM throughout Southern California. She also presents a regular Million Kids Insider Alert video and post for her subscribers featuring breaking news and expert case analysis.

Simply stated: Opal cares deeply about the safety of young people and their families.

**Special Agent Richard Stepien** has been an Acting Group Supervisor with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York's (NY) Child Exploitation Investigations Team (CEIT) since August 2024. In this supervisory position, Mr. Stepien provides operational insight of all Child Exploitation investigations within the five boroughs of New York City, and oversees HSI personnel as well as federal, state, and local law enforcement task force personnel operating within his purview. Prior to this assignment, Mr. Stepien investigated numerous Child Exploitation investigations at HSI NY while working closely alongside HSI NY's Dark Web and Cryptocurrency Groups. Mr. Stepien led Operation Innocence Bought, a nationwide, multi-agency investigation against a dark web vendor selling child sexual abuse material (CSAM) This investigation resulted in identifying over 70

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suspects all across the United States, leading to many federal or state prosecutions, as well as, identifying many victims worldwide.

Mr. Stepien began his federal law enforcement career in 2010 with the Vermont State Police as a State Trooper and served four and a half years as a Detective Trooper assigned to Special Investigations Unit, which included crimes of child sex abuse and the exploitation of vulnerable adults. In 2019, Mr. Stepien was hired as a Special Agent with Homeland Security Investigations and was assigned to the New York Field Office where he served as a member of the Child Exploitation Investigations Team. While with HSI, Mr. Stepien was the recipient of multiple Awards; Director's Leadership Award, ICE Director's Humanitarian Award, and HSI New York's Dennis P. McCarthy Act of Valor Award.

Mr. Stepien obtained his Bachelor of Science Degree from St. Lawrence University.

**Selina Higgins, MA, MSW, LCSW-R, DBT-C, United States Army Veteran** has been the inaugural Executive Director of the NYC Administration for Children's Services' Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy (OCTPP) since its creation in 2015 as the first office within a NYC public agency dedicated to trafficked and at-risk youth. OCTPP coordinates all aspects of policy and practice concerning children involved in human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, including identification, assessment, prevention, intervention, mitigation and service coordination for the entire NYC child welfare system. OCTPP also consults with and supports other City and community-based agencies, provides training for professionals and communities, facilitates a variety of trafficking awareness and prevention groupwork models for youth and administers the NYC Safe Harbour Program, and a large-scale Child Trafficking Awareness Campaign. Originating with Selina as its only staffing, across the past ten years OCTPP has incrementally expanded to a talented team of eight clinical and administrative members.

Selina has worked in the field of child welfare for 32 years, beginning as a Child Protective Specialist investigating abuse and maltreatment reports, then rising to a variety of clinical and administrative roles. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW-R) with a Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology, a Master of Social Work, and post-graduate certifications in Infant-Parent Dyadic Therapy and Trauma Assessment, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (partial) and Social Work Administration. Additional substantial clinical training includes Play Therapy, Suicide Prevention, Creative Arts Therapy, and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) and Other Specified Dissociation Disorder (OSDD).

In addition to policy and procedure development, Selina is a huge believer in hands-on filling of identified gaps. She works directly with youth in providing therapeutic services through a wide variety of group work models (some self or co-designed). The trainings she has designed, presented and/or produced for OCTPP have reached over 40,000 attendees since 2015, including attendees from over 40 states and Canada. She is directly responsible for the creation, production and administration of:

- The annual NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference
- The annual NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Spring Training Series
- The annual NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Fall Training Series
- "Movin' On": The NYC Child Tattoo Eradication Project
- The "Here for You" Vulnerable Youth Credible Messenger Program
- The 40-Page Toolkit: Child Trafficking and What YOU Can Do About It: Tools for NYC Child Welfare Professionals (now available as a free downloadable pdf)
- ACS' first Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) Consultation Team

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Selina was also integral to the development and ongoing upgrade of the *Child Trafficking Database* (CTDB), and the *CTDB E-Learning* animated electronic training.

Selina is an honorably discharged and decorated veteran of the United States Army. She has been an MSW Practicum Instructor for over 20 years. Publications include a variety of articles, the *Child Trafficking and What YOU Can Do About It: Tools for NYC Child Welfare Professionals* toolkit, and co-authoring *Human Trafficking in the Foster Care System* for the Springer Nature 2020 textbook, *Medical Perspectives on Human Trafficking in Adolescents: A Case-Based Guide*. Presentations include international, national and regional conferences, including multiple original workshops at the International Association of Social Work with Groups' annual symposiums and Shared Hope International's Juvenile Sex Trafficking (JuST) conferences, the largest and most renowned annual conference on child sex trafficking in the United States. In 2020, the NYC's Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence honored Selina as an Advocate of New York City.

In 2023, Selina provided expertise as a Program Advisor for Shared Hope International's JuST Conference. In 2024, Selina was honored as "Outstanding ACS Staff" at the 12th Annual LGBTQAI+ and Ally Awards, for envisioning and developing the *Working with LGBTQ+ Youth Who Have Experienced or are At-Risk for Sex Trafficking* curriculum, which has to date trained 1,400 people in knowledge and sensitivity since its launch in November 2023.

**Stephen Knoepfler, JD** has been the Chief of the Bronx County District Attorney's Human Trafficking Unit (HTU) since it was created in June 2019. The Human Trafficking Unit focuses on rescuing and providing social services and resources to victims of sex trafficking and labor trafficking, as well as investigating, apprehending, and convicting those who promote, profit from, or patronize the commercial sex trade. HTU consists of a close-knit group of 3 to 4 felony ADAs, a designated Crime Victims Advocate, and a trial preparation assistant. A graduate of New York University School of Law, Steve has worked at the Bronx D.A.'s Office since October 2010. Prior to joining the Special Victims Division as HTU's Chief, Steve spent his entire career in the Investigations Division, beginning with the Rackets Bureau where he handled organized crime and public integrity cases.

Steve has led or second-chaired seventeen trials—including seven felony trials, and nine jury trials—including a fifteen-witness sex trafficking and witness tampering jury trial. In 2018, he led a Frye hearing on whether the psychological phenomenon of traumatic bonding is generally accepted in the psychological community; the favorable ruling will set a precedent for allowing this testimony in all future special victim cases.

**Steven Gordon** has over 18 years of government, nonprofit direct service, administrative, development, and technical assistance/capacity building experience. His areas of expertise include, but not limited to HIV/AIDS, youth development, homelessness, sexual and behavioral health, program development and implementation, grants management, race equity, social justice, community organizing, LGBTQAI+ equity, gender equity, and policy/advocacy. Currently, as the Director of LGBTQAI+ Equity Strategies at ACS, Steven leads the agency's LGBTQAI+ equity efforts. Steven's past professional experiences includes:

- Principle of Steven Gordon Consulting where his primary functions were development, fundraising, grant writing, technical assistance, and capacity building to private companies, nonprofits, hospitals/healthcare centers, and colleges/universities. Some of his clients include: Gershwin Lehman Group, Sage Publishing, Howard University, Vera Institute of Justice, Substance Abuse Mental and Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), etc.

# 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning

- Executive Director of The Pride Network, a small Brooklyn based non-profit whose mission is to empower and support the next generation of LGBTQ Leadership through social justice education, workforce development and leadership training.
- Director of Drop-In for Ali Forney Center. There he managed a large program budget, 6 grant contracts, a team of staff, interns and consultants of over 20, and a very busy triage center for youth in crisis.


## NEW Resource For NYC Youth Receiving Foster Care Services:



### TRAFFICKING AWARENESS CONTEST FOR YOUTH 2024

Create a Poem, Song, Story, or Artwork on **WHAT IS CHILD TRAFFICKING?**

**RULES FOR PARTICIPATION**



**Goal**  
To provide youth with an opportunity to think about child trafficking and a voice to discuss how they feel about a topic that has frequently been in the news. This will also provide an opportunity for adults to understand what youth think about trafficking.

**Open to**  
All youth in Foster Care ages 12 and up.

**How to Participate**  
Provide a poem, song, story, or drawing (e.g., drawing, drawing, drawing) on the topic of "What is Child Trafficking?" The youth may labor or both labor and art to create their work. Youth may choose what they want to discuss. The submission may consist of a drawing, poem/song lyrics, or a story.

**Contest Rules**  
All youth in care ages 12 and up may participate. All submissions must be original. Submissions can be in the form of a poem/song lyrics, story or drawing. Each submission must include a signed consent/release form.


**Due Date**  
All entries must be received by September 30, 2024. All submissions must be reproduced on a separate sheet of paper. Winners will receive special certificates noting their achievements (in addition to their prize/gift cards).

**Judging**  
Judging will occur using the same age range categories required by City Hall's Local Law 41 (Safe Schools Act) Report: (12 to 15), (16 to 17), (18+). There will be three selected winners in each category: poetry, story or drawing. Prizes: \$200, \$100, \$50. Mentions: \$25. All winners will receive a certificate of appreciation.


**Eligibility**  
Youth who are interested in the Youth Leadership Council (YLC) members, ACS' Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy (OCTPP) team members and other to be determined. Judging will occur virtually through a Teams meeting (or multiple Teams meetings if many entries are received). YLC participants will be compensated for their time with gift cards.

★ **Submission Procedure**  
Submissions will be scanned and emailed to: [Trafficking.awareness.contest@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:Trafficking.awareness.contest@acs.nyc.gov). The email will contain the youth's name, age, agency and case planner and the case planner's supervisor's contact information (email and phone number). The email will also include the youth's email and cell phone number, if applicable.

All email must include a signed consent/release form that is applicable to the youth's age and legal status:  
 Under age 18  
 Under age 18 and freed for adoption  
 Age 18 and above



Consent/Release Form  
Under age 18



Consent/Release Form  
Under age 18 and freed for adoption



Consent/Release Form  
Age 18 and above

The Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy is sponsoring a **Trafficking Awareness Contest for NYC Youth in Foster Care.**

The goal of the contest is to provide youth with an opportunity to think about child trafficking and a voice to discuss how they feel about a topic that has frequently been in the news. This will also provide an opportunity for adults to understand what youth think about trafficking.

The contest is open to all **New York City youth in Foster Care ages 12 and up.**

All submissions must be received by Friday January 31, 2025.

**For more information and the submission procedure:**

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/trafficking-awareness-contest.page>



## 2025 NYC Child Trafficking Prevention Conference:

Assessment, Recognition, Safety Planning

### How to Contact the Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy (OCTPP)

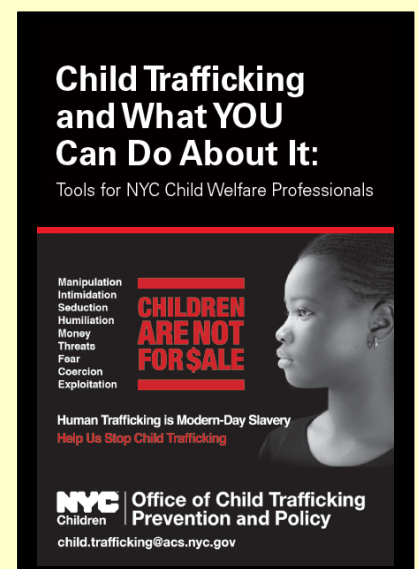
- For NYC child notifications: [Child.trafficking@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:Child.trafficking@acs.nyc.gov)
- For information on upcoming trainings: [Traffickingtraining@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:Traffickingtraining@acs.nyc.gov)

### Access our Resources:

New for 2025! – web accessible version of ***Child Trafficking and What YOU Can Do About It: Tools for NYC Child Welfare Professionals.***

Link available on the Preventing Youth Trafficking webpage, or click here:

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/youth/childtrafficking/2024/what-you-can-do-about-it.pdf>



### Webpages with Downloads:

- **About the Office of Child Trafficking Prevention and Policy:**  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/traffickedyouth.page#about-octpp>
- **Preventing Youth Trafficking:**  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/traffickedyouth.page>
- **Resources for Professionals (training handouts):**  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/child-trafficking/resources.page>
- **Trafficking Awareness Contest for Youth:**  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/trafficking-awareness-contest.page>
- **Virtual Resource Fair (anti-trafficking providers):**  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/virtualresourcefair.page>
- **Awareness Campaign Materials (posters and brochure in 12 languages!):**  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/virtualresourcefair.page#AwarenessCampaigns>



**Testimony  
Before the New York City Council  
Committees on Children and Youth, Public Safety, and Women and Gender  
Equity**

**Oversight Hearing on  
Support for Young Victims of Human Trafficking**

**Presented by Assistant Commissioner Dr. Amy Wilkerson**

**January 28, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens, Chair Salaam, Chair Louis and members of the committees on Children and Youth, Public Safety, and Women and Gender Equity. I am Dr. Amy Wilkerson, Assistant Commissioner for Runaway and Homeless Youth Services at the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). I am joined by Samantha Dawkins, Senior Director of Runaway and Homeless Youth Services. On behalf of Commissioner Howard, thank you for this opportunity to discuss DYCD's supports for young victims of human trafficking.

DYCD is grateful to have worked with the City Council and other partners to build a comprehensive continuum and ecosystem of services for runaway and homeless youth ages 16 through 24. DYCD's Runaway and Homeless Youth programs are designed to serve youth holistically, enabling them to obtain the services needed to help them thrive. The three types of services include residential services, drop-in centers, and street outreach. Combined, they reach more than 40,000 young people annually. RHY programs serve vulnerable youth, some who have been victims of human trafficking or who could be susceptible to exploitation.

Residential services include Crisis Services programs and Transitional Independent Living Support programs. Residential programs for young people ages 16 through 20 offer a total of 753 beds, and for homeless youth adults ages 21 to 24, there are four programs with a total of 60 beds. We are incredibly pleased that Mayor Adams recently announced the expansion of our

homeless young adult capacity by 100 more beds. We look forward to briefing the Council on plans for the new beds in the time ahead. At our eight DYCD-funded Drop-In Centers, youth are provided with basic needs such as food and clothing, and supportive services such as recreational activities, health and educational workshops, counseling, and referrals to additional services, including shelter as needed. At least one center in each borough is open 24 hours a day, every day of the week. Street Outreach focuses on locations in the city where runaway and homeless youth tend to congregate, offering on-the-spot information and referrals.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Services providers help young people to address a range of challenging circumstances through counseling and referrals and offering opportunities for youth to meet their life goals while living in a safe and supportive environment. All DYCD funded RHY programs are required to report youth that have experienced commercial sexual exploitation. Young people have an opportunity to disclose abuse and exploitation at any time. Key moments are during assessment at intake, and during regular case management sessions at which point the young person can receive a range of services, including referrals to specialized mental health services. Providers report incidences of trafficking and exploitation to DYCD on a monthly basis. In Fiscal Year 2024, out of the 3,110 youth served in residential programs and 2,829 who received case management in Drop In Centers, 118 young people disclosed that they were victims of sexual exploitation.

All RHY residential program staff members must complete 40 hours of annual training. The mandatory training includes information about identifying and assisting youth who have been sexually exploited. Other relevant topics include safety and emergency procedures, HIV awareness and education, case records and confidentiality, reportable incidents and child abuse, and domestic violence.

Counselors in RHY programs work with youth to develop Individualized Service Plans to outline short-term and long-term goals. They can receive a range of supportive services both directly and through referrals, which include health and mental health services, counseling, education and career support, substance abuse prevention, violence intervention and prevention counseling, and housing assistance. When appropriate, staff members assist young people in reuniting with their families or with moving to transitional and longer-term programs.

We thank the Council for their investment of nearly \$1 million to support victims of human trafficking. This allocation, a first for DYCD, supports programs that offer counseling and assistance with mental health, education, immigration, housing and employment services to victims of human trafficking. Our Intergovernmental and Discretionary teams can update the Council on the programs' impact later this year.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to discuss how we are addressing the needs of young people in the runaway and homeless youth programs who may have been victims of trafficking. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Council, advocates, providers, and young people with lived experiences to improve services for youth. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.



Tuesday, January 28, 2025

**STATEMENT OF DEPUTY CHIEF CARLOS ORTIZ  
NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY, CHILDREN AND YOUTH AND  
WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
JANUARY 28, 2025**

Good afternoon Chair Salaam, Chair Stevens, Chair Louis, and members of the Council. I am Deputy Chief Carlos Ortiz and I am the Commanding Officer of the Special Victims Unit within the Detective Bureau of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). I am joined today by Director Kathleen Baer from the Special Victims Unit, Lieutenant Joseph Picarello from the Human Trafficking Squad, and Director Josh Levin from the Department’s Legislative Affairs Unit. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the NYPD’s commitment to keeping the most vulnerable New Yorkers out of harm’s way and how to connect those who are being trafficked with the resources they need.

Estimates put the number of human trafficking victims worldwide at hundreds of thousands to millions. In the United States alone, some estimates report that one in seven children reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children became victims of sexual trafficking. The Human Trafficking Task Force, of which our Human Trafficking Squad is a part, is responsible for investigating both sex and labor trafficking. Our mission is to conduct trauma informed, victim centered and offender focused investigations.

Our targeted enforcement, often focused around hotels, are based on leads from Human Trafficking Hotlines, or referrals from Patrol, the Missing Persons Squad, District Attorneys’ Offices, the Department of Education, as well as from the Administration for Children’s Services, and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. We then set up encounters and, when there is evidence of trafficking or that the victim is under age, members of the Human Trafficking Squad will conduct a rescue operation, utilizing trauma informed training, to save these young people. Overall, during the calendar year of 2024, we conducted over 300 operations, resulting in 191 arrests of pimps, traffickers, and those who promote prostitution, and 86 rescues of trafficking victims, 27 of whom were minors. I want to stress how challenging this can be, as survivors are sometimes hesitant to accept help. I am happy to report, however, that we have many stories of survivors who, over time, saw us as a lifeline, and thanked us for saving them.

One recent example highlights the effectiveness of our work – a five-week long missing child operation, which coincided with the National Missing Children’s Day on May 25<sup>th</sup>. This operation, called “Operation We Will Find You 2”, was a nationwide, US Marshal led operation that included both the NYPD’s Human Trafficking and Missing Persons Squad. This multi-state, multi-city operation focused on what we call “critically missing” children and covered all five boroughs. “Critically missing” means children who are victims of trafficking, or who have an aggravating risk factor or factors such as physical, economic, or mental health issues. The results of the operation

were overwhelmingly positive – in the span of five weeks, we helped locate or recover 41 critically missing children, ten of whom had been the victim of trafficking.

This multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach provides the best results to our survivors who are transitioning out of a dangerous situation. We work in conjunction with our advocate partners to ensure we provide the best, most trauma-informed service to survivors. As I mentioned earlier, exploited or trafficked individuals are often deeply traumatized and trauma bonded to their abusers, and require significant resources and counseling to break the cycle of this abuse. For those reasons, not only do we work with advocates from internationally and nationally recognized organizations who support survivors of human trafficking, we work with advocacy organizations within the communities we serve to provide the most complete and culturally sensitive care to survivors. By cultivating strong relationships with the Mayor’s Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence (ENDGBV) and our Family Justice Centers that operate in each borough, we have been able to better serve our survivors by providing information and access to services. Through those relationships, we are able to connect our survivors with support services, such as medical care, mental health and psychiatric counseling, housing needs, and legal representation for immigration concerns, as well as education opportunities, job readiness training and job placement, as well as providing basic human needs such as food and clothing. We also provide support for our advocate partners when they conduct direct, self-initiated engagement with survivors.

Our outreach efforts also go beyond these one-on-one interventions. We are currently working in conjunction with the MTA and ENDGBV on an upcoming awareness campaign that will provide information on how to access services and report human trafficking, which will be seen by the millions of people who ride subways and buses each day. This month, we are also putting together a panel of experts to speak at the I-95 Working Group Conference in Tyson’s Corner, Virginia. Experts from the NYPD and FBI, the advocacy community, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the District Attorneys’ Offices will come together to discuss emerging issues around sexual exploitation and human trafficking along the I-95 corridor. We are always looking to innovate and expand our reach into these vulnerable communities to provide help and bring traffickers to justice.

Now, turning to the bill being heard today. **Intro. 831** would require the Department to publish information on our website relating to missing persons. The Department supports the intent of this bill and we look forward to working with the Council to craft a version of the legislation that most effectively captures the data and information envisioned by the bill.

The loss of innocence these young people experience at the hands of traffickers is immeasurable and should never be allowed to happen. The Department is laser focused on preventing and investigating these crimes and ensuring each survivor has access to the resources they need to begin the healing process. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and it is our pleasure to answer any questions you may have.



**Testimony of Juan Diaz**  
**Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**  
**Submitted to The New York City Council Subcommittee on General Welfare**  
**Oversight – Administration of CityFHEPS Program**  
**January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Ayala, and members of the Committees on General Welfare, for the opportunity to submit testimony at this hearing regarding the Administration of CityFHEPS Program.

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

CCC is a steering committee member of the Family Homeless Coalition (FHC), a coalition comprised of 20 organizations representing service and housing providers, children's advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience with family homelessness. We are united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelter, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter.

[CCC's](#) recent Keeping Track of New York City's Children book revealed that in 2023, 30% of NYC renters pay at least half of their income towards rent, and one in three renter households with children are living in overcrowded conditions. Additionally, there were more than 12,000 residential evictions, and more than 46,600 children reside in the NYC shelter system. Given the clear housing and homelessness crisis facing NYC, we cannot understand the value of housing vouchers like CityFHEPS.

We value the Department of Social Services' efforts to improve CityFHEPS application approvals by providing additional training to human services staff, adding CityFHEPS renewals to be submitted via ACCESS HRA, and expediting the shelter relocation process. However, more investments and programmatic reforms are imperative to ensure that more households receive housing assistance in a timely manner.



Additionally, potential federal cuts to public benefits grants at the local level underscore the urgency of the City Administration making significant investments in resources like CityFHEPS rental assistance for families at shelters and to remain in the community.

**The following investments can improve access to CityFHEPS assistance and reduce waiting times for families in need of housing security. Additionally, these investments can reduce unnecessary shelter, social services prevention, and housing court costs.**

- **Implement and fund the CityFHEPS expansion.** This would significantly remove administrative and eligibility barriers like shelter history and would expedite access to housing support for families in the community and in shelters, regardless of immigration status. In 2023, many of the 12,000 housing court evictions could have been prevented with CityFHEPS assistance, as households without shelter history are currently not eligible for CityFHEPS assistance.
- **Increase the budget for Homebase by \$37.9 million to a total of \$100 million.** In recent years, Homebase providers have taken on tremendous increases in caseload as well as an ever-expanding set of responsibilities, including submitting CityFHEPS applications, renewals, transfer requests and rent portion adjustment requests. This has not been accompanied by funding levels to match the new post-Covid reality. Additionally, Homebase providers provide emergency rental assistance for clients in need of CityFHEPS to stay on applications.

**The following cost-effective administrative reforms can increase case workers' performance, reduce the CityFHEPS application packet preparation time frame, and reduce submission errors.**

- **Reduce the single issue time frame.** The current single issue time frame is 30 days, but often the process for applying and getting the voucher is longer and requires the single issue to be resubmitted. We recommend a 90-day time frame.
- **Making the application process more accessible.** The application packet forms should be readable/fillable PDF forms that can be signed electronically and emailed back, while still allowing for a paper process.
- **Reduce CityFHEPS application paperwork amount.** Consider reducing the amount of paperwork to submit a CityFHEPS packet. Most of the information in each application packet is repetitive. Currently, case managers must complete and submit large packets, in some cases over 50 pages.

**The following recommendations can improve housing stability for households also receiving cash and shelter allowance grants and reduce rental arrears for households seeking CityFHEPS assistance.**

- **Increase public benefits grants funding.** With the potential significant Federal level budget cuts to essential programs like housing, cash and shelter allowance, it is imperative for the City Administration to enhance funding to offset imminent cuts at the Federal level.

- **Increasing rental assistance funding.** Many households must apply for emergency rental assistance (One Shot Deals) to reduce their rental arrears, before they can apply for CityFHEPS to preserve their apartment. The Federal level budget cuts will have a severe impact on emergency rental assistance for families facing evictions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to collectively working to reduce administrative barriers and improving CityFHEPS rental assistance for vulnerable families with children.

**New York City Council****Hearing on Int-0831-2025 / Requiring NYPD to Report on Missing Persons****Committee on Children and Youth****January 28, 2025**

Good afternoon. My name is Brianna Palmer, and I am an intern working with the Anti-Human Trafficking team at Covenant House New York (CHNY), where we serve youth ages 16 to 24 who are experiencing homelessness. Many of these young people are survivors of human trafficking or have been at heightened risk of victimization. I want to thank the Committee on Public Safety and the bill's sponsors - Council Members Louis, Stevens, Riley, Restler, Farías, Williams, Brooks-Powers, and Schulman - for the opportunity to testify in support of Int. No. 831.

CHNY is the largest provider of services to homeless youth in New York City, serving over 1,600 young people annually. Beyond providing safe shelter, we offer a comprehensive array of services, including medical care, mental health services, education, employment training, and critical legal assistance. Many of the young people who come to us have faced unimaginable trauma, including trafficking.

**Why this Legislation is Vital**

The issue of missing persons is deeply intertwined with human trafficking. At CHNY, we know that when young people go missing, especially those from marginalized communities, they often become vulnerable to exploitation, including sex and labor trafficking. This proposed legislation represents a critical step toward addressing these vulnerabilities by requiring comprehensive, annual reporting on missing persons cases in New York City.

Having accurate and transparent data is essential to understanding the scope of the problem and crafting effective interventions. By disaggregating missing persons data by age, race, gender, and precinct, as well as including information on cases linked to trafficking, this bill provides a framework for identifying trends and responding more effectively to the needs of at-risk individuals.

**Key Provisions and Their Impact**

1. *Transparency in Missing Persons Reporting:* Mandating annual reports will highlight systemic disparities and trends in missing persons cases. The disaggregation of data ensures that we can see which populations are disproportionately affected and allocate resources accordingly.
2. *Focus on Trafficking Victims:* Requiring data on the percentage of resolved cases that involve trafficking victims underscores the link between missing persons and exploitation. This information will be invaluable for organizations like ours, which work tirelessly to support survivors and prevent trafficking.

3. *Accountability and Policy Development:* By institutionalizing this reporting, the NYPD will be better positioned to identify patterns, improve investigative strategies, and collaborate with community organizations to protect vulnerable individuals. This accountability also ensures that policies are data-driven and reflective of the realities faced by marginalized communities.

### **Why This Matters to Covenant House New York**

At CHNY, many of the young people we serve have been reported missing at some point in their lives. These missing persons reports are often the first indication that a youth is in danger of exploitation. Unfortunately, existing gaps in reporting, data collection, and coordination have made it difficult to track these cases effectively and provide the interventions needed to prevent harm.

This legislation will give organizations like ours the data needed to advocate for survivors, inform our services, and partner more effectively with law enforcement and policymakers. Additionally, it will send a clear message that New York City prioritizes the safety of its most vulnerable residents.

We are grateful to the sponsors of this bill for recognizing the importance of transparency and accountability in addressing missing persons cases. Your leadership will not only help prevent trafficking and exploitation but also support the efforts of organizations like CHNY that work daily to help young people reclaim their futures.

I urge the City Council to pass Int. No. 831. By doing so, we take a meaningful step toward protecting our city's most vulnerable individuals and ensuring that no missing person is overlooked.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to this critical issue. Together, we can make New York City a safer, more equitable place for all its residents.

**Testimony of  
Sebastien Vante  
Associate Vice President, Streetwork Project  
Safe Horizon**

**New York City Council  
Oversight Hearing: Support for Young Victims of Human Trafficking**

**Committee on Public Safety  
Chair, Council Member Yusef Salaam**

**Committee on Children & Youth  
Chair, Council Member Althea Stevens**

**Committee on Women & Gender Equity  
Chair, Council Member Farah Louis**

**January 28, 2025**

Good afternoon. My name is Sebastien Vante, and I am the Associate Vice President of Streetwork Programs at Safe Horizon. Safe Horizon's mission is to stand with those who have experienced violence, abuse and exploitation. We offer unwavering support, and advocate for system change. Safe Horizon envisions a world where safety is a universal human right, and we all share a collective responsibility to protect and uphold it. We strive for a society where people are safe in their communities, homes, bodies and minds.

I am honored to share with you the critical work we do to support homeless youth and young adults, a population that faces extraordinary challenges, including the very real risk of trafficking and exploitation.

At Streetwork, our mission is to meet homeless youth where they are -- on the streets, in parks, or other public spaces—and provide immediate support and a path to stability. Traffickers prey on the vulnerability of these young people, targeting their lack of resources, safety, and support. This is why the collaboration between our Streetwork Project and Safe Horizon's Anti-Trafficking Program (ATP) is so vital.

ATP provides our staff both in our Drop-In Centers and our outreach teams with specialized training to recognize the signs of trafficking and take appropriate steps to address their immediate and long-term needs. Whether during an intake conversation or while engaging youth in the field, our teams are equipped to identify red flags, ask the right questions, and connect these young people to critical resources that can help them escape exploitation and begin their healing journey.

But the work doesn't stop there. Many of the youth we serve are also navigating complex immigration challenges. For these young people, our Immigration Law Project plays an essential role. By offering legal assistance to those who may qualify for asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), or other protections, we provide a lifeline for young people who are not only fleeing trafficking but also seeking safety and stability in a new country. The legal protections and support we offer are often the key to helping them rebuild their lives, free from fear and harm.

To truly address the issue of trafficking, it is essential that Streetwork and other runaway and homeless youth providers have the resources and support they need to identify survivors and offer immediate assistance. This requires strong partnerships with the Mayor's Administration and the City Council to ensure there is adequate funding, staffing, and training for programs like ours. With sufficient resources, we can make sure that every young person who is vulnerable to trafficking receives not just shelter, but also access to specialized programs that meet their unique needs.

This work is deeply impactful because it saves lives. Each connection we make whether through outreach, anti-trafficking support, legal assistance, or specialized care is a step toward ensuring these young people have the safety, dignity, and freedom they deserve.

Human trafficking thrives in the shadows, but our work is about shining a light and empowering those most at risk. I am proud of the collaboration between our programs, the role we play in addressing these challenges, and the opportunity to advocate for the resources and support that make this work possible. I am also grateful for our partnership with the City Council and for your ongoing support for our work.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this critical work with you today.





**Testimony submitted to the NYC Council Committees on Children and Youth, Public Safety,  
and Women and Gender Equity  
Joint Oversight Hearing: Support for Young Victims of Human Trafficking  
January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Introduction and Thanks:** My name is Eric Lee, and I am the Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of America- Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are a local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Stevens, Chair Salaam, and Chair Louis and Members of the Children and Youth, Public Safety, and Women and Gender Equity Committees for the opportunity to testify today.

**About Us:** VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

**Background:** VOA-GNY operates 6 emergency and one Tier II domestic violence shelters. We also serve a large proportion of survivors within our general homeless family and women's shelters and are launching a Federally funded transitional housing program for survivors of labor and sex trafficking later this year.

Our confidential domestic violence shelters offer comprehensive case management services and on-site groups that help survivors gain the long-term skills that enable them to meet everyday challenges after leaving the shelter. Workshops are crafted with a trauma responsive lens and include topics designed to promote long term stability post-shelter including Budgeting and Money Management and Workforce Readiness. In addition, our shelters offer interactive educational activities and recreation for children, counseling, therapy and other mental health services, including art therapy. We also operate a first in the nation brain trauma screening program that was created in response to the hidden injuries many survivors sustain which often go undetected.

**Widening Access to Domestic Violence Shelter for Single-Person Households**

Thank you, Chair Louis, ENDGBV Commissioner Sethi, and Members of the Council and Administration, for your leadership and support of Resolution 165-2022, calling on the State Legislature to pass the SAFE Act. This State legislation would help survivors in single-person households, which is often how survivors of trafficking present at intake, obtain access to domestic violence shelters. While we are disappointed that the Governor vetoed the bill, we are hopeful that the State Legislature will reintroduce it again this session. We will notify the Council and Administration if it is reintroduced and look forward to your continued leadership and support in widening access for single-adult survivors to DV shelters.



## **Enhancing Services for Survivors of Trafficking with Domestic Violence Shelters**

Survivors of human trafficking may turn to domestic violence or general homeless shelters to flee their traffickers, but additional expertise and services are needed to better support them in their healing. VOA-GNY, in recognition of this service gap, is standing up a new Federally funded transitional housing program for survivors of labor and sex trafficking, which will include a FT Human Trafficking specialist to conduct outreach and public awareness as well as offering specialized training to our staff within our domestic violence shelters on serving survivors of trafficking. Given recent actions of the Trump Administration to curtail Federal funding to immigrant support organizations<sup>1</sup>, we ask the Council to please consider adding local funding to help bridge the gap.

While our new transitional housing program will strengthen the skillsets of existing staff, there remains a need for deeper clinical expertise than the current Domestic Violence contracts fund. Survivors suffering from traumatic brain injuries (TBI), PTSD, and other serious risk factors which can pose barriers to long-term safety and stability have acute needs related to physical or emotional trauma, mental health or other crises. Case managers and social workers and other staff across our shelter sites would benefit from additional clinical support for their most complex and high-risk cases, and the ability to better connect clients to supports and services within their local communities. We would welcome new resources from the Council and the Administration to help provide enhanced support to survivors.

We are grateful for the opportunity to testify and look forward to working with the Council and the Administration to continue to improve access, shelter, and services for survivors of domestic violence and trafficking throughout New York. Should you have any questions, please email me at [elee@voa-gny.org](mailto:elee@voa-gny.org)

Respectfully submitted by Eric Lee, Director of Public Policy, Volunteers of America- Greater New York.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nj.com/middlesex/2025/01/trump-administration-cuts-off-funding-to-7-nj-organizations-helping-refugees.html>

**From:** [Mari Moss](#)  
**To:** [Mari Moss](#)  
**Cc:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Speech in Support of Intro 831\*\*  
**Date:** Saturday, February 1, 2025 1:05:41 PM

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Good afternoon,

Thank you to the Safety, Youth and Children, and Women and Gender Equity Committee for inviting me to speak today. My name is Mari Moss. I am the proud mother of three young Harlem girls and a committed advocate for families and communities. I serve on the Mayor's Task Force to End Gender and Domestic-Based Violence, the Neighborhood Advisory Board, the Community Action Board, and the We Love Harlem Initiative.

I am here today to express my strong support for Intro 831, a critical step toward protecting children and families and addressing systemic failures within our institutions.

One of the most urgent issues this legislation addresses is the criminalization of parenthood—particularly motherhood—in domestic violence cases. Far too often, protective mothers are penalized by the very systems that should support them, with children being unjustly removed from their care. This not only traumatizes families but also exposes children to greater risks, including exploitation and trafficking.

When parental rights are ignored or weaponized, the consequences are devastating. Practices like parental alienation and systemic neglect allow harm to thrive. We already have laws in place to safeguard survivors and their children, but these laws are not consistently or effectively enforced,

leaving families vulnerable and unsupported.

Intro 831 is a vital step in ensuring greater accountability and collaboration. Workers in child welfare must be regularly vetted to guarantee they are following proper protocols and safeguarding families. Agencies such as ACS, the Child Trafficking Prevention Department, and the Domestic Violence Unit must collaborate closely with the Family Justice Center and the End Gender and Domestic-Based Violence Task Force. This type of cross-agency coordination is essential to ensure survivors are not slipping through the cracks and that families receive the support they need.

Additionally, education and prevention must be prioritized. Young people need to be taught to recognize violations, understand their rights, and know what resources are available to them. Through collaborative efforts, prevention programs, and community outreach, we can empower youth to protect themselves and create a culture of safety and awareness.

As a mother and advocate, Iâ€™ve seen these failures firsthand. My experiences navigating these systems inspired me to write the Letter to Legislation, a call to action addressing these systemic issues. Supported by leaders across all levels of government, this initiative aligns with the goals of Intro 831 by advocating for reforms that protect children, empower families, and ensure justice is upheld.

We cannot afford to allow these systems to continue failing our most vulnerable. Intro 831 is a powerful tool in the fight to educate, train, vet, and reform these agencies. It represents a commitment to ensuring every child and family is treated with dignity, respect, and the protections they deserve.

Thank you for your time, and I strongly urge the passage of Intro 831.

**The Honorable Mari Moss, MPA**

Mother of Calia, Sophia and Anya  
Community Action Board Region 9  
Neighborhood advisory Board 10  
[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 12, 2024, at 1:51 PM, Mari Moss [REDACTED] wrote:

thank you chair althea Gibson for hosting this hearing

Mari moss regional representative for the community action board dycd for east harlem and central harlem provides millions of dollars of federal funding to ACS and the providers of the ACS among other city agencies

I also serve on the mayors task force for end gender and domestic based violence.

I am in support of 0009 report to parents

And 0652 mental health services

Seven years ago, my life was irrevocably altered, and the trauma of that time continues to echo not only in my life but also in the lives of my three daughters, whom I affectionately call my “little Harlem girls.” They were just 2, 4, and 6 years old when I became a victim of domestic violence at the hands of my then-husband. At the time, I was pursuing a master’s degree in Public Administration at MCNY, working in city government, and developing an economic theory to reduce poverty in Harlem.

My trajectory was promising, but it all came to a halt when the court system failed me.

After enduring multiple instances of physical, verbal, and mental abuse, I called the police during a particularly violent episode where my husband threw me to the ground while I was already in a cast. Instead of protection, I was met with systemic failure. The courts sided with my abuser, leaving me homeless, alienated from my children, and forced to endure unimaginable grief.

My experience with ACS only deepened this pain. I was limited to seeing my daughters under their supervision, which exacerbated the trauma. In one particularly egregious incident, an ACS worker, Beatrice Bennon, assaulted me in front of my children as I documented the abuses I was experiencing. I captured the entire incident on video. My youngest daughter, just two years old at the time, clung to my leg, pleading to the ACS workers “I’m going to roar at you like a dinosaur and put you in jail.” Even at that tender age, she recognized the injustice.

As I reassured her that I loved her and promised to protect her, ACS staff forcibly pried her away, despite her cries and desperate reach for



me. That moment—my daughter’s terror and my helplessness—remains etched in my memory. Since that day, access to my children has been severely restricted, despite my ongoing efforts to advocate for them and rebuild my life.

This systemic failure goes beyond my personal story. ACS, an agency tasked with protecting children and families, has often failed in its mission. Its lack of oversight has allowed instances of sexual exploitation, trafficking, and abuse by unvetted consultants and untrained staff within its ranks. These grave injustices, coupled with the systemic endorsement of domestic violence and parental alienation, have caused irreparable harm to countless families.

As a member of the Mayor’s Task Force to End Gender-Based and Domestic Violence, I am appalled that such egregious violations can persist within city agencies, funded by taxpayer dollars. If ACS were truly part of the solution, such atrocities would never occur.

I am urgently calling for:

1. **A Joint Committee Investigation** involving the Women’s Committee, Judiciary, ACS Oversight, Public Safety, and Investigations to

examine the systemic failures within ACS. We need to fact check commissioners and what they testify to vs. what is actually happening within the agencies, because sometimes Commissioners are not always aware of what is actually happening. CRM tracking services and involvement can help provide understanding in this regard.

2. **Independent Oversight** to ensure proper vetting of staff and consultants and the implementation of safeguards to protect children and families as well as trainings for sensitive matters of domestic violence and other forms of abuse within families.
3. **Reparations and Accountability** for survivors of parental alienation and abuse at the hands of ACS and the court system corrective actions are needed for mistakes made by the agencies.

This is not just a personal issue—it is a matter of public safety and justice. The city must confront this crisis head-on and implement meaningful reforms to prevent further harm to families.

The Honorable Mari Moss, MPA  
Mother of Calia, Sophia and Anya  
Community Action Board Region 9

# Neighborhood advisory Board 10



Sent from my iPhone

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 11/28/2022

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Winette Saunders

Address: First Deputy Commissioner

I represent: Administration for Children's

Address: Services

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/28/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eric Lee

Address: 1710 Troutman St. Ridgewood, NY 11385

I represent: Volunteers of America - Greater New York

Address: 135 W 50th St, NY NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 831 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: January 28, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brianna Palmer

Address: 2523 Dinville Ave Bronx, NY

I represent: Covenant House New York

Address: 460 W 41st New York, NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 831 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/28/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Director Josh Levin

Address: 2 Police Plaza

I represent: NYPD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 831 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/28/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lieutenant Joseph Picarello

Address: 2 Police Plaza

I represent: NYPD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. 831  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sebastian Vank

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Safe Horizon, Streetwork Project

Address: 2 Police Plaza



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 831 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/28/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mari Moss

Address: 280 Frederick Douglass Blvd.

I represent: The Mayor's office to End Gender Violence  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 831 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ann Marie Foster

Address: 34-11

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 831 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/25/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deputy Chief Carlos Ortiz

Address: 1 Police Plaza

I represent: NYPD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 831 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/28/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deputy Kathleen BAER

Address: 1 Police Plaza

I represent: NYPD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/28/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ina Mendez

Address: Deputy Commissioner, Family Permanency Services

I represent: Administration for Children's Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/28/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sabine Chery

Address: Associate Commissioner Office of Older Youth Development Services

I represent: Administration for Children's Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: SALONI SETHI

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: MAYOR'S OFFICE TO END GBV

Address: 253 BROADWAY, NY NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Samantha Dawkins

Address: DYCP - Senior Director, Runaway and Homeless Youth

I represent: Services

Address: 2 Lafayette Street

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Dr. Amy Wilkerson

Address: DYCP - Assistant Commissioner for Runaway

I represent: and Homeless Youth Services

Address: 2 Lafayette Street