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Save Women's Lives: Combat Human Trafficking

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey:

Tomorrow, January 11, is Human Trafficking Awareness Day—a day on which we remember that more than 20 million human beings toil and suffer as slaves across the globe. A day to rededicate ourselves to creating an environment of zero tolerance for human trafficking in all its forms.

When I first introduced the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 1998, the legislation was met with a wall of skepticism and opposition. People both inside of government and out thought the bold new strategy that included sheltering, asylum and other protections for the victims, long jail sentences and asset confiscation for the traffickers, and tough sanctions for governments that failed to meet minimum standards, was merely a solution in search of a problem.

For most people at that time, the term trafficking applied almost exclusively to illicit drugs or weapons. Reports of vulnerable persons—especially women and children—being reduced to commodities for sale were often met with surprise,

incredulity or indifference. It took two years to overcome opponents and muster the votes for passage.

Now, after the enactment of my Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (P.L. 106-386), and subsequent reauthorizations of the original landmark law, we see strong efforts to fight trafficking at both the federal and state level.

This year New Jersey ranked *first* in the country—with one other state—for enacting aggressive anti-human trafficking laws—i.e. we are leading the nation both on helping the trafficking victims, who are mostly women and children, and on cracking down on the thugs who coerce them into this modern day slavery.

Being first in the nation is a distinction of which New Jersey can be proud especially as we apply our strong anti-trafficking laws for Super Bowl XLVIII.

Along with welcoming enthusiastic fans, New Jersey is also preparing for an influx of traffickers who will bring with them trafficking victims in an attempt to cash in on the Super Bowl crowds.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that more than 10,000 prostituted women and girls were moved to Miami for the Super Bowl in 2010.

According to Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott, the Super Bowl can be described as “the single largest human trafficking incident in the United States.” A 2011 study conducted by [Traffick911](#) with law enforcement agencies found that online escort ads increased dramatically in Dallas from 135 in mid-January to 367 as the Super Bowl approached. One hundred thirty three arrests were made for underage prostitution (a key indicator for trafficking) in Dallas during the Super Bowl 2011.

Capt. Doug Cain, Louisiana State Police spokesman, said after the 2013 Super Bowl in New Orleans, “Any time you have a large influx of tourists in town and they’re spending a lot of money, there’s a criminal element that moves in to take advantage of that.”

In light of this history, New Jersey’s location on the I-95 corridor, and easy access to bus stations, trains and airports, the state can expect to be a target for an influx of prostituted women and girls at Super Bowl XLVIII. **Still**, if New Jersey properly prepares and trains—promoting “situational awareness”—it can undercut traffickers and help save their victims.

For several years now, I have pushed efforts to enhance training not only for law enforcement but for tourism personnel such as hospitality industry workers and transportation operators—bus drivers and station operators, train conductors, taxi drivers, trucking associations, and airline industry personnel.

In 2010, I chaired a conference—focused on the airline industry—bringing together the relevant U.S. agencies, such as Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), various U.S. airlines, and non-governmental organizations—to train commercial carrier employees in the identification of trafficking victims.

Best estimates show that every year 600,000 to 800,000 trafficking victims are moved across international borders. Millions more victims are moved within national borders. Speakers at my conference explained how flight attendants were the “first line of defense” in the fight against human trafficking.

The federal government has responded with the Blue Lightning Initiative—a voluntary training program in which airlines can collaborate with the Departments of Transportation and Homeland Security and the CBP. They work together to help train flight crews and airline personnel about common signs of human trafficking and how they can safely report suspected human trafficking cases.

With minimal modifications, the training is easily adaptable to professionals in other transportation industries as well as workers in the hotel industry.

The New Jersey Human Trafficking Task Force, which was originally launched and funded through a program created by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and its reauthorizations, is the key anti-trafficking coordinating agency for New Jersey. In anticipation of the Super Bowl, the Task Force has taken a hands-on approach expanding the reach of New Jersey’s anti-human trafficking law enforcement unit as well as victim services.

They have also increased print and electronic public service announcements and training programs and symposiums for law enforcement officials, health care workers, lawyers, transportation workers and hoteliers.

The New Jersey Department of Homeland Security and Preparedness has also stepped up to combat trafficking at the Super Bowl, distributing flyers to EMS, fire department, law enforcement, and other emergency care professions so that these front line professionals will know when to be concerned that someone is a trafficking victims and how to respond appropriately.

By the end of January, the New Jersey is expected to have thousands of law enforcement personnel and civilians with the goal of not only ramping up New Jersey's anti-trafficking efforts for the Super Bowl, but using the event to fully institutionalize reforms going forward—so that more women and children will be protected in the future.

This concept has proven straightforward, effective—and it is catching on. In December, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which is made up of 57 countries from Europe and North America, endorsed my plan to make anti-trafficking training for airline employees, other public and commercial carriers, as well as hotel workers a primary goal in the international strategy to combat human trafficking. In an earlier session, the OSCE parliamentary assembly adopted my resolution to implement such trainings in each member country.

Any country that competes to host the next major sporting event must be fully aware of the human trafficking

vulnerabilities associated with such events and the best practices for protecting and rescuing the victims. The Super Bowl—and every other major sporting event worldwide—should not have a dark side of human trafficking, plain and simple.

This year, let us mark Human Trafficking Awareness Day by remembering that trafficking awareness training for individuals likely to interact with trafficking victims in their daily jobs—and being aware ourselves—can create an environment of zero tolerance for human trafficking. Awareness can and will save lives.