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Thank you to the Constitutional Officers Association of New Jersey

*Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)
On receiving the federal Legislator of the Year Award from
The Constitutional Officers Association of New Jersey
September 16, 2021*

Thank you, Paula, for your kind words and thank you to the Constitutional Officers Association of New Jersey for this honor.

Special thanks for doing the hard work of providing essential services that are at the core of making our democracy function.

From ensuring accurate conveyance of inheritance during probate to facilitating elections—which has been especially challenging during COVID—to making our communities safer and so much more, you make a tremendous positive difference every day.

You are indispensable.

The pandemic caused unconscionable delays in passport issuance and renewal, so we teamed up—and helped many.

My office alone had 743 constituent cases related to passports.

One was from a bride going to Mexico for a destination wedding. Everyone in the party, except her had a valid passport. After numerous calls, the National Passport Center came through four days before departure.

A new husband set to leave on his honeymoon in Turks and Caicos discovered his passport had expired. We worked for hours and he with passport in hand and with a big smile on his face, said he didn't want to be married and divorced in the same week.

One idea proposed by Monmouth Clerk Christine Hanlon was to extend passport expiration dates so I introduced legislation, joined by my friend and colleague Congressman Albio Sires to do that, and began lobbying consular affairs to bring staffers back to reduce the backlog.

Today they are fully staffed up and underscoring the progress made, in the second week of September 345,000 passports were issued while 283,000 applications were received.

On law enforcement, I've written many laws to combat crime and assist victims, especially victims of human trafficking.

Last October 28th marked the twentieth anniversary of an historic law I authored—the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000](#).

That law created a new whole-of-government domestic and international strategy and established numerous new programs to protect victims, prosecute traffickers with sentences of up to life imprisonment and to the extent possible, prevent it in the first place—the three Ps.

A week ago, I—joined by Frederick Douglass' great, great great grandson Ken Morris and Congresswoman Karen Bass of California—introduced H.R. 5150, the bipartisan Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Act of 2021 which include many programs including initiatives to make young people situationally aware on how to avoid becoming a victim.

Special thanks to Sheriff Mastronardy for getting the National Sheriff's Association last year to endorse Sami's Law named in honor of Samantha Josephson of Robbinsville after she was murdered by a fake Uber driver in South Carolina. Uber and Lyft had aggressively lobbied the Association to oppose it, Mike succeeded in winning the Association's endorsement. Sami's Law passed the House, so we are pushing hard to enact it into law.

In 2008, working with Maureen and Richard Kanka—parents of Megan who was murdered in Hamilton in 1994—I introduced [International Megan's Law](#).

It passed the House in [2010](#), [2014](#), [2016](#)—and, thankfully, finally cleared the United States Senate and was signed into law in 2016—eight years later!

International Megan's Law is a major prevention strategy targeting sex tourism. The law requires convicted child sex offenders who travel abroad to provide notice to the U.S. Government—via the [Angel Watch Center](#)—prior to departure of all planned destinations.

Upon receipt of the travel itinerary, the U.S. government informs the destination country or countries of those plans.

The destination country or countries are then empowered with actionable information to render the child predator inadmissible. To date, more than 15,500 notifications have been made with 6,000 convicted child sex offenders denied entry.

Concerned that some may fail to include their true destination when filing—and out of an abundance of caution and concern for kids—their passports contain the following message that will not likely go unnoticed by border agents: **“The bearer was convicted of a sex offense against a minor and is a covered sex offender pursuant to 22 United States Code Section 212(b).”**