



# POLARIS PROJECT

FOR A WORLD WITHOUT SLAVERY

**COMMENTS ON HB946  
PRESENTED TO THE LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT  
COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 15, 2011**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Labor and Public Employment Committee; on behalf of the more than 15,000 supporters of Polaris Project, thank you for providing us with an opportunity to speak about the crime of human trafficking. My name is James Dold and I am Policy Counsel for the Polaris Project.

Polaris Project is a leading national organization dedicated to combating human trafficking within the United States by serving victims, raising public awareness, and engaging in policy advocacy at both the State and Federal level. We have been selected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to be its training and technical assistance provider and have operated the National Human Trafficking Resource Center and Hotline since December 2007. During this time our human trafficking call specialists have fielded over 25,000 calls from across the nation. We have also provided victim services to more than 300 survivors of human trafficking since 2004 in our D.C. and New Jersey client service offices.

I would like to take a moment to specifically thank Representative Awana for introducing HB946. We greatly appreciate the Hawaii Legislature's concern for and willingness to address the crime of human trafficking, a grave violation of human rights.

Labor trafficking is a crime that affects not only the fishing boys of Ghana or the domestic servants in Sudan, but also people right here in America. It is a crime that not only affects individuals in Mumbai, but also individuals in Honolulu. Human trafficking is a monstrous crime, shrouded in secrecy, often unknown except to those who remain bound by invisible chains. It is one of the great injustices of our lifetime and will continue to threaten the freedom of our children, our neighbors, and our fellow brothers and sisters until it is eradicated completely.

### **Human Trafficking National and Global Perspective**

Human trafficking is the modern-day slavery, and it is one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world, consisting of the subjugation, recruitment, harboring,

or transportation of people for the purpose of forced labor or services or commercial sexual exploitation. Victims of human trafficking in the United States include children and adults, as well as foreign nationals and U.S. citizens.

The United States Government estimates that between 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders for forced labor and sexual servitude each year, 70 percent of whom are women and over 50 percent are children. This does not include those trafficked within their own countries, which is as high as 2 to 4 million persons. Of those trafficked across international borders, up to over 60,000 individuals at a minimum are trafficked into the United States each year. These numbers suggest that the actual figure for the scope of human trafficking is much higher. Experts also estimate that between 100,000 to 300,000 American children are at high risk of being trafficked within the United States for sexual exploitation each year. The State Department estimates that there are roughly 12.3 million slaves in the world today, more than at any other time in the history of the world. Another estimate, by renowned human trafficking expert Kevin Bales, puts the total number of people trapped in modern-day slavery at an estimated 27 million. Most victims suffer a horrific life in which they are repeatedly beaten, raped, starved, chained or locked up, and psychologically tortured. For many, the only way of leaving is by means of escape, rescue, suicide, or murder.

There have been trafficking investigations in all 50 States and incidence of trafficking have been reported in 91 U.S. cities. Human trafficking is a crime that thrives in secrecy and is fed by the insatiable greed of those who see human beings as a commodity to be profited off of. Globally, human trafficking generates over \$32 billion in annual revenue.

Recently, Polaris Project served a labor trafficking victim, "Sabine," who was brought over from Rwanda by a wealthy family in the United States. Sabine was the only survivor from her family of the genocide in Rwanda, so when a wealthy family offered her a chance to move to America with them she agreed. Upon arrival, however, she quickly learned that she had been taken advantage of. She was imprisoned in the home; unable to leave, she was made to work around the clock. Anytime she had to sleep she was made to sleep on the kitchen floor. After six months of servitude she was allowed to go to church for an hour each Sunday. On one of her visits she was approached by a kindly Rwandan man. He asked if she was ok and after learning about her situation, he helped her escape. He took Sabine to one of our partner agencies and once they learned her story they immediately referred her to Polaris Project.

Unfortunately, Sabine's story is far too common in the United States. I cannot impress upon members of the Labor and Public Employment Committee enough, that human trafficking is alive and well in the United States and it affects every corner of our nation. It is also prevalent in Hawaii.

### **Human Trafficking in Hawaii**

Every day we receive calls through the National Human Trafficking Resource Center referencing situations where men, women, and young children are subjected to violence, coercion, and fraud in order for their pimps or traffickers to profit. While we do not know how many victims there are in Hawaii, we do know that the National Hotline has received calls referencing trafficking situations in cities throughout the state of Hawaii. Some of these calls were classified as tips that human trafficking was occurring in different cities, including Honolulu, Hilo, and Wakiki Beach.

Most recently, Hawaii was home to the largest labor trafficking case in the history of the United States. On September 1, 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice brought formal charges against the President and Chief Operating Officer of Global Horizons for "engaging in a conspiracy to commit forced labor and document servitude." The case involved 400 Thai workers who were lured with false promises of high-paying farm jobs but were exploited and forced into labor, often with little or no pay. The victims were sent to 13 states including Washington, California, Florida, Colorado, Hawaii, Utah, the Carolinas, the Dakotas, Kentucky, New York, and Virginia. One of the most publicized cases came from victims who worked at 13 to 14 farms on Oahu, Kauai, Maui and the Big Island, tending to coffee, fruits and vegetables for Aloun Farms and Maui Pineapple Farm.

Human trafficking is a scourge that preys on the most vulnerable among us and exploits those who are in need of protection. And while it may be easy at times to pretend that human trafficking is not a crime that affects every day Americans, I can tell you with absolute certainty that it does. It is a crime of absolute evil. But by taking action and enacting anti-human trafficking legislation you will provide law enforcement and prosecutors in Hawaii with the tools that are needed to combat it.

### **HB946 and Labor Trafficking**

While HB946 has many great provisions that we believe should be included in a comprehensive labor trafficking law, it is not as strong as HB577. We do appreciate and support, however, the spirit of HB946, and believe that there are provisions within this bill that should be incorporated into HB577, or vice versa. For instance, the language referencing traditional trafficking activities and a civil remedy for victims are key to adopting a strong labor trafficking law.

It is our intention with our testimony today, to merely highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of both HB946 and HB577. We believe a bill that combines provisions from each, would be the most comprehensive. However, based on our assessment of State laws from across the country, as well as federal anti-trafficking laws, we are of the opinion that of the two bills currently before the committee, HB577 is the stronger. If you should have any questions, please feel free to call me at (202) 745-1001, ext. 132. Mahalo.