



## MY OPINION

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# Spotlight on Human Trafficking

Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday of the year. It is an opportunity to spend time with family and friends while enjoying great home-cooked food. In addition, Thanksgiving is the perfect time to reflect and give thanks to the people who have enabled us to be where we are in life. Unquestionably, my parents are driving forces behind any success I have achieved. As TYLA embarked on a new public service project this fall, *Slavery Out of the Shadows: Spotlight on Human Trafficking*, I was reminded how thankful I am to have parents that not only loved, but also protected my siblings and me when we were children.

*Slavery Out of the Shadows: Spotlight on Human Trafficking* is a multimedia project intended to educate the public about the horrific crime of human trafficking, related laws, and the effects on our local communities. Human trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transporting, or procurement of a person for labor or services for the purpose of involuntary servitude, slavery, or forced commercial sex acts. Simply put, human trafficking is a contemporary form of slavery. It is considered to be one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises and traffickers generate billions of dollars in profits annually by victimizing millions of people around the world. The victims look just like you and me — men, women, boys, and girls from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Despite public perception, human trafficking is not just an international problem; it is a domestic problem occurring within our borders and affecting U.S. cit-

izens and residents. The Trafficking Victims Prevention Act, enacted in 2000, was the first comprehensive U.S. federal law to address human trafficking. In 2003, Texas became one of the first states to pass human trafficking legislation criminalizing such conduct. The Texas legislature has continued to address the issue of human trafficking by, among other things, creating the Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force. The Task Force is charged with fostering cooperation among multi-jurisdictional state and federal law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations; publishing statistics regarding the nature and extent of human trafficking in Texas; and conducting training for victim service providers, law enforcement, the judiciary and court personnel, and medical service providers.

Texas children are routinely targeted and exploited by traffickers. According to the 2011 Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force Report, runaway minors and homeless youth face the greatest risk among children of becoming victims in this state. The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children estimate that one out of every three children is approached by a trafficker within 48 hours of leaving home. These children are often escaping abusive or disrupted homes and are then subjected to psychological and physical abuse by the trafficker. Shockingly, in some instances, parents are the traffickers and exploit their own children. For these reasons, it is imperative that we focus on providing safe and stable homes for our children.

Nonprofit organizations, such as Children at Risk, Catholic Charities, Houston Rescue and Restore, and the Klein Frank Foundation consistently focus on human trafficking to raise awareness and ensure that victims get the services they need. TYLA collaborated with these groups, activists, educators, and others from across the country to create *Slavery Out of the Shadows: Spotlight on Human Trafficking*. The DVD and supplementary pamphlets are designed to raise awareness about human trafficking with members of the legal profession, teachers, students, citizens, and potential victims. This January, during National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, TYLA will launch *Slavery Out of the Shadows: Spotlight on Human Trafficking*, and will distribute the resources across the state and online at [tyla.org](http://tyla.org). In addition to TYLA, the American Bar Association and the Houston Bar Association have made human trafficking awareness a priority this year. I hope that you will join us in taking a stand against human trafficking globally, nationally, across the state, and in your local communities. Your active participation could stop a trafficker and more importantly, save a potential victim.

Lastly, special thanks to the TYLA committee members working on this project: **Rebekah Brooker** and **Alyssa Long**, executive committee advisors; **Dustin Howell**, **Priscilla Camacho**, **Lacy Durham**, and **Danny Razo**, co-chairs; **Laura Pratt**, **Sharesa Alexander**, **Tania Ward**, **Soraya Hانشew**, **Clint Harbour**, **Judge Amanda Torres**, **Baylor Wortham**, **Brandy Wingate**, and **Patrice Childress**. ✪