

September 11, 2015

Assistant Attorney General Karol Mason
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
810 Seventh Street NW
Washington, DC 20531

Dear Assistant Attorney General Mason,

As you consider and evaluate joint grant applications for enhanced collaborative models to combat human trafficking – I would like to express my full support and favorably recommend the grant proposal submitted by the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and North Dakota Council on Abused Women’s Services (CAWS North Dakota). The proposal would bring increased cooperation between state, local, tribal, and federal agencies in collecting data about and responding to human trafficking. North Dakota does not have the resources to attack this problem using only state and local resources. It is only through increased cooperation between state, local, tribal, federal and non-profit entities that North Dakota will be able to properly respond to the increased amount of trafficking occurring in the state in recent years.

With an abundance of natural resources, the state was able to thrive during the recent economic downturn – with unemployment rates well below the national average, increased average wages, and more jobs than the state could fill. These same circumstances that led to a booming economy also led to a massive population increase by almost 10 percent in just four years – with some counties at the center of the oil boom seeing population increases higher than 40 percent during that same period. The majority of those coming into the state have been largely males, without families – or families left behind in other states – that have large amounts of disposable income from the well-paid jobs out in the oil-patch. This combination has led to a perfect storm for a certain criminal element to take advantage of this situation – with the most unfortunate result – a drastic increase in sex trafficking across the state, but particularly in the oil patch in western North Dakota.

CAWS North Dakota has worked for over two decades in the state, providing and connecting victims of sexual assault and domestic violence with resources and support services in their communities. They have been one of the organization’s leading efforts in North Dakota to address human trafficking through education, advocacy, and provision of services – and are one of the founding members of the statewide coordinated anti-trafficking organization FUSE (Force to end hUman Sexual Exploitation). As the former Attorney General for North Dakota – where I

had oversight and control of BCI – I am well aware of their outstanding law enforcement work throughout the state. BCI, as North Dakota’s primary law enforcement agency, has been essential in conducting operations to identify not just sex traffickers but those they traffic as well.

Together with the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of North Dakota (USAOND), these entities have created an unparalleled collaborative relationship that has enabled the state to swiftly and successfully address human trafficking in North Dakota. The state has taken tremendous steps forward recently – for instance, passing a safe harbor law and establishing victims’ assistance programs – in helping trafficking victims assimilate back in to normal life. These steps are encouraging, but more resources are needed. Helping trafficking victims recover from their experiences is not what BCI is designed to do, and dealing with traffickers is not something CAWS is equipped to do. It is only through collaboration that North Dakota will manage to deal with all of the problems brought about by human trafficking including not just the prosecution of traffickers but providing the mental health services to the victims of trafficking as well.

This proposed project is a collaboration between CAWS North Dakota, BCI, and the USAOND to create the ND Human Trafficking Task Force (NDHTTF). This task force will increase North Dakota’s ability to identify traffickers and their victims, support the prosecution of human trafficking at all levels of government through collaboration between BCI and USAOND, and provide victims with the comprehensive services required to help victims deal with the various issues that must be addressed following a person’s time being trafficked. Through NDHTTF, proactive investigations on human trafficking will occur, data will be collected on a regular basis and various non-profit entities will work with CAWS, BCI, and USAOND to ensure victims’ needs are taken care of.

These organizations have a history of producing successful outcomes and prudent management, and I am confident the program they have proposed in their grant application will further enhance North Dakota’s efforts to severely reduce human trafficking in the state through identification and prosecution of traffickers – while providing trafficking victims the services they need to recover and successfully transition back to a normal life.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate