



USA - Anna Blackburne Rigsby

Remarks

Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby

Greetings and Introduction

Good morning. My name is Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, Chief Judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals and head of the local court system of Washington, D.C. As a member of the United States delegation of the International Association of Women Judges, I am honored to participate in this two-day summit of Women Judges and Prosecutors from around the world to discuss human trafficking and organized crime. I want to thank the Vatican and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences for hosting this summit and for convening judges, lawyers, and legal scholars from around the world to discuss ways we can tackle one of the defining human rights and access to justice issues of the 21st century: *how to combat human trafficking, both sex and labor trafficking, in the modern era while ensuring that, in doing so, we are protecting the rights and human dignity of victims.*

I also want to thank His Holiness Pope Francis for his vision, empathy, and resolve in combating human trafficking in all its shapes and forms and for making this important topic one of the top priorities of his papacy. Pope Francis is a true visionary and human rights defender, and has demonstrated boundless love and compassion for everyone. Thank you Pope Francis.

I am thrilled to participate in this summit, which convenes women judges and prosecutors from around the world. This summit demonstrates the importance of working together to combat human trafficking. With my time today, I would like to discuss the role of judicial leadership in ensuring access to justice for the victims of human trafficking. I will address the initiatives that the District of Columbia Courts have undertaken to combat human trafficking – specifically, on the heart wrenching issue of “Commercially Sexually Exploited Children”.

Background Information

The District of Columbia, Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, is an independent jurisdiction of nearly 700,000 people. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals is the highest court of our local court system. Our courts work collaboratively with the local prosecutor's office, the District of Columbia Office of the Attorney General, and police force, and the federal prosecutor's office, the United States Department of Justice.

Victims of human trafficking either are from the Washington, D.C. area, transit through Washington, D.C. on their way to other locations, or are brought to Washington, D.C. for labor and sexual exploitation. This fact shocks many of our residents, who believe that human trafficking is something that occurs in other countries, but not in the United States.[1]

Recent statistics show that the local Washington, D.C. market for sex trafficking is worth over \$100 million and continues to rise. Many factors contribute to the District of Columbia's human trafficking problem. Washington, D.C. is a major international destination, it has high levels of poverty, and is a gateway to markets for trafficking victims, such as New York City. In 2016, there were 84 confirmed cases of human trafficking in Washington, D.C., along with 161 cases in Maryland and 152 cases in Virginia. Most of these cases related to sex trafficking. [2] To combat this growing human trafficking problem, the District of Columbia Courts and local government agencies have established Human Trafficking Initiatives and Taskforces.

D.C. Courts Human Trafficking Initiative

The District of Columbia Courts have instituted initiatives to combat Human Trafficking. Our judges are being trained to recognize the link between modern day human trafficking and vulnerable populations who appear in courts. For example, an individual who is being prosecuted for prostitution may very well be a trafficking victim, and it is up to the courts, in conjunction with other stakeholders, to recognize that these individuals are *victims* who require access to court services. Similarly, a victim of domestic violence who appears in court may also be a victim of human trafficking.

The same is true for the prosecution of traffickers – traffickers are more likely to be charged with violating administrative codes such as labor violations, restaurant codes, health codes, etc., or crimes related to

prosecution than trafficking. To this end, the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, which handles criminal cases involving juveniles, established a multidisciplinary taskforce of justice system stakeholders to address the sexual exploitation of court-involved youth and those at risk of being trafficked. Stakeholders include:

- o The Courts
- o Social Services
- o OAG
- o Child and Family Service Agency
- o Department of Behavior Health
- o Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services
- o Metropolitan Police Department
- o Other NGOs

One of the first accomplishments of this new task force was the creation of a “Multidisciplinary Protocol” for addressing Commercially Sexually Exploited Children. This document seeks to ensure that children that are trafficked or are at risk of being trafficked are effectively identified, monitored, and directed to appropriate services. The protocol seeks to formalize the sharing of information between law enforcement, the prosecutor’s office, the courts, and court service organizations, and to ensure that sexually trafficked or at-risk children do not fall through the cracks. The taskforce’s ultimate goal is to create, within the District of Columbia Courts, a new specialized division of the court focused on identifying Commercially Sexually Exploited Children and providing supervision and support.

The basis for the District of Columbia Courts’ new initiative, entitled **HOPE** Court (“**H**ere **O**pportunities **P**repare you for **E**xcellence”) is largely based upon Los Angeles’ **STAR** Court (“**S**ucceeding **T**hrough **A**chievement and **R**esilience”), which has been met with success in preventing sex trafficking of minors.[3] We expect to initiate the **HOPE** Court in the new year.

In addition, the Family Court has also sought to emphasize Human Trafficking issues and provide education to our judges and local stakeholders through educational programs and conferences. On October 27, 2017, Family Court held its annual Interdisciplinary Conference on human sex trafficking, entitled “*The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Recognizing, Understanding, and Addressing the Problem*”. On July 19, 2017, the National Center for Juvenile and Family Court Judges held a training on Human Trafficking in Washington, D.C., in coordination with the Family Court. On January 29, 2016, Family Court held a training on preventing child sexual exploitation.

The success of the **HOPE** court, and other initiatives designed to tackle human trafficking, depends on the successful collaboration of government, courts, and non-government entities.

Other Initiatives

Additionally, the United States federal government established the District of Columbia Human Trafficking Task Force to increase the prosecution of traffickers while identifying and serving the victims of trafficking.[4] This task force also includes Washington’s law enforcement agencies and the Office of the Attorney General, and federal agencies such as the Department of Labor, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Civil Rights Division, among others.

Additionally, the Office of the Attorney General and the District of Columbia government have implemented Human Trafficking Initiatives designed to educate the public, especially young people, on the warning signs for human trafficking.[5] In 2016, the Mayor’s Office announced a public awareness campaign designed to raise awareness of human trafficking and promote reporting through posters in our Metro system. Statistics show that around Washington, D.C., community members tend to report the most number of human trafficking incidents.[6]

The public’s understanding of human trafficking is critical. For example, recently on an airline flight from Seattle to San Francisco, a flight attendant was able to identify a victim of human trafficking victim and was able to help her being rescued. She credited her training to spot signs of human trafficking.

Final Remarks

As Chief Judge of the D.C. Court of Appeals and head of the D.C. Courts, I fully support the establishment of the **HOPE** Court and multidisciplinary protocols for identifying and assisting human trafficking victims. I welcome

delegates from around the world to come to Washington, D.C. to see the work of our Human Trafficking Taskforce, and to share ideas and innovative measures to help prevent human trafficking. Human trafficking is a global issue that requires all of our attention.

In addition to the work of the D.C. Courts, I also must highlight the critical work on the issue of human trafficking by non-government organizations and associations, such as the National Association of Women Judges and the International Association of Women Judges. In 2015, the National Association of Women Judges, in conjunction with the State Justice Institute, and the New York State Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts, published a program manual on human trafficking – which includes training of defining human trafficking, identifying human trafficking, analyses of human trafficking statutes and case studies, and ways to differentiate international and domestic victims. Co-authored by Judge Arline Pacht, founder of the International Association of Women Judges.

NAWJ has also explored numerous facets of human trafficking in training sessions.

§ NAWJ 2017 Conference – A discussion on labor trafficking

§ NAWJ 2015 Conference – Domestic Sex Trafficking: Overcoming the Barriers to Successful Prosecutions

§ NAWJ 2014 Conference – Unaccompanied Immigrant Children; Labor Trafficking

§ NAWJ 2014 Midyear Conference – Access to Justice for Labor Trafficking Victims

Again, I am very pleased to participate in this importance conference and I look forward to engaging in interesting discussions with my sister judges, prosecutors, and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to better understand this problem and develop constructive solutions to help eradicate human trafficking.

END NOTES

[1] See Washington D.C.'s Serious Sex-Trafficking Problem, Wash. Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/sex-slavery-isnt-just-a-problem-overseas/2016/01/15/bc3acb04-badd-11e5-829c-26ffb874a18d_story.html?utm_term=.1a3954f71d79 (last visited Nov. 6, 2017).

[2] See District of Columbia, National Human Trafficking Hotline, located at <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/district-columbia> (last visited Nov. 6, 2017).

[3] See *Succeeding Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court – Los Angeles Superior Court*, California Courts, located at <http://www.courts.ca.gov/27693.htm> (last visited Nov. 6, 2017): Court and Probation have partnered to provide referrals to specialized services for underage victims of sex trafficking. The genesis of the program was the noticeable increase in prostitution cases being filed in the delinquency courts, some carrying over to the dependency courts. A study of those cases confirmed that there was a demonstrated problem of sexual trafficking taking place among minors who were on the streets of LA County. Development of the Succeed Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court was aimed at providing intervention and assistance to youth caught up in the perils of human sex trafficking. . . . The outcome of the program was the creation and continued success of the STAR Court that provides often life-saving services and intervention for minors who might otherwise be lost to the streets forever. The unexpected benefits are the collaborative participation and efforts of a multidisciplinary team of players who are invested and passionate about providing intervention services for youth.

[4] The D.C. Human Trafficking Task Force has four main goals: To facilitate a more coordinated anti-trafficking effort in the D.C. area through protocol development, extensive community outreach, proactive investigations, law enforcement training, intelligence sharing, and more formalized partnerships between law enforcement organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); To identify citizen, resident and transnational victims of both sex and labor trafficking; To provide comprehensive services to trafficking victims; To increase the prosecution of traffickers. D.C. Human Trafficking Task Force, The United States Attorney's Office District of Columbia, located at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/human-trafficking> (last visited Nov. 6, 2017).

[5] See OAG Human Trafficking Initiatives, Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, located at <https://oag.dc.gov/page/oag-human-trafficking-initiatives> (last visited Nov. 6, 2017).

[6] See *supra* note 2.