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## Stronger human trafficking laws sought in Ky.

Updated 2:00 pm, Saturday, January 5, 2013

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FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Some lawmakers will push to strengthen Kentucky's human trafficking law during the legislative session that begins on Tuesday.

Rep. Sannie Overly, D-Paris, told the Lexington Herald-Leader (<http://bit.ly/Ut91lB>) that she plans to sponsor a bill similar to one she introduced last year that would increase training for law

enforcement and use money from those convicted of such crimes to pay for victim services.

The state has prosecuted 16 cases since human trafficking became a crime in 2007, but advocates say the law is weak and doesn't do enough to punish perpetrators or protect victims.

"We know that victims need additional protections and we also know that we need a system in place to fund those services," said Marissa Castellanos, human trafficking program manager with Catholic Charities in Louisville. "The current statute that we have is pretty basic and ultimately just defines what human trafficking is."

Rep. John Tilley, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, said he agrees that changes are needed.

"It still doesn't have all of the components necessary to combat the problem," said Tilley, D-Hopkinsville. "It needs more teeth."

Overly's bill passed the House last year, but stalled in the Senate.

Castellanos says the cases that have been prosecuted in Kentucky are "a drop in the bucket" compared to what's actually happening. Catholic Charities has identified 91 instances since 2008 of what it considers human trafficking. She said more than half involve sex trafficking and victims under 18.

"We know that it's widely under reported and under prosecuted," Castellanos said. "So much of trafficking-related activities have moved indoors and online."

In a review of the 16 cases prosecuted in Kentucky, the Herald-Leader found that most cases involved teen girls being sold for sex by a person they knew.

Although some cases are prosecuted in federal court, a majority stay in state court.

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"What we are finding is that about 60 percent of all human trafficking cases are declined for federal prosecution," said Taryn Mastrean, a spokeswoman for Shared Hope International. "That's why it's so important that states have strong laws so law enforcement has more tools to go after this crime."

Information from: Lexington Herald-Leader, <http://www.kentucky.com>

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