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Kansas law falls short in combating human trafficking

By MIKE MCGRAW
The Kansas City Star

A national anti-trafficking organization is giving Kansas low marks on state efforts to police human trafficking, but Missouri fares much better.

Even though Kansas' governor and attorney general have been strong voices against trafficking, an analysis by the Polaris Project found that the state still lacks the full arsenal of laws considered "critical to a comprehensive anti-trafficking effort."

"Missouri is in the best category and Kansas is in the second lowest," said Mary Ellison, director of policy at Polaris. "And that is interesting because (Kansas Gov. Sam) Brownback has been such a champion on the human trafficking issue. Kansas has gotten a start, but there is quite a bit more to do."

Kansas received only four of a possible 10 points in a state-by-state analysis by Polaris, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group. Missouri scored seven out of 10 points in the same study.

"In Kansas, we are proud of our free-state history, and we are now bringing that strong spirit to the fight against the modern-day slavery known as human trafficking," Brownback said in a written statement responding to the report.

The Republican governor added that his administration will continue to work with the state's attorney general on the issue.

When he was in the U.S. Senate, Brownback co-sponsored the original federal anti-trafficking legislation in 2000 and has long been an advocate for tougher policing. And when he was majority leader in the Kansas Senate, Derek Schmidt, now the attorney general, successfully pushed amendments to the state's existing human trafficking law that could force traffickers to forfeit their assets.

Schmidt said he would continue to discuss further steps Kansas can take to find, prosecute and incarcerate human traffickers. He added: "We welcome all suggestions, including these, and will continue efforts to strengthen our enforcement efforts."

Human trafficking is a \$32 billion a year worldwide industry, including in the United States, where sex and labor trafficking of Americans and immigrants are the most common forms of the crime. While Congress has passed tough anti-trafficking laws in recent years, the Polaris group said it's increasingly important that states combat the crime on their own.

The Polaris study noted that Kansas still needs to adopt legislation that would broaden the state's investigative tools. They include requiring training of local police, establishing an anti-trafficking task force, making victims aware of a national anti-trafficking hotline, offering more assistance to victims, allowing victims to file civil lawsuits against their traffickers, and vacating convictions for sex trafficking victims.

In Missouri, Rep. Anne Zerr, a St. Charles Republican who has championed tougher trafficking laws, welcomed the state's relatively high ranking.

"I think we have gotten a lot done," Zerr said, pointing to a new human trafficking bill signed into law last month by Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat.

The law toughens current laws, calling for prison terms of up to 30 years — and life in some cases — and adding fines of up to \$250,000.

Though human trafficking once was thought to be a coastal phenomenon, Missouri and Kansas have emerged as prosecution hot spots.

In addition to some child prostitution cases brought under anti-trafficking laws, federal authorities in Kansas City prosecuted in 2009 what was then the largest labor trafficking ring uncovered in the United States. The scheme forced an estimated 1,000 immigrants from several countries to work for low wages cleaning hotel rooms.

Polaris' ratings track 10 categories of state laws. Overall, 11 states, including Missouri, met most of the objectives the group maintains are needed to combat the problem. Fifteen met either five or six of those conditions and 15, including

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Kansas, met three or four.

The states with the lowest rankings were Massachusetts, West Virginia and Wyoming. No state met all the legislative goals.

To reach Mike McGraw, call 816-234-4423 or send email to mcgraw@kstar.com.

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Norma Jean Almodovar

Everyone jumps on the anti- trafficking bandwagon because it is the politically correct thing to do... but what exactly is it that you are trying to accomplish? While many think the goal is to stop child sexual exploitation- certainly a laudable goal- the primary goal of these so called anti- trafficking organizations is the elimination of all consenting adult commercial sex. In attempting to achieve this NON laudable goal, these anti- prostitution zealots do not really care about the real victims of either child sexual exploitation or the adult men and women who do actually choose to engage in commercial sex. Women like me. Although I am retired, I am and have been a sex worker rights activist for the past 29 years. I have seen the horrendous treatment of prostitutes by society at large and by law enforcement in particular. Should anyone care to learn the truth about what impact your laws against consenting adult commercial sex have on the supposed victims of human trafficking, you might find the information I have gathered through these 29 years interesting. Please visit our site: <http://www.policeprostitutiona...> and look at the list of pedophile law enforcement agents - over 100 in 2011 alone- as well as the list of rapist cops who think it is their right to extort prostitutes for sexual favors- but they don't stop there- they rape many women with whom they come into contact- including women who have called the police because they were victims of domestic violence or rape at the hands of another man... And while you are at it, please do visit the US Government website and read the very enlightening report on the actual number of victims of human trafficking- adult and underage persons..."Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents"- published this past April (2011). My question to all of you who accept the lies of organizations like Polaris without question, with all the money that the government gives to such organizations and all the attempts to find them, where are all these victims? Why can't they be found? What is the money being spent on? <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/conte...>

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kathy1949

Congratulations MO legislatures and the federal authorities in KCMO!

Kansas (Brownback *et.al.*) get out of people's relationships and do your job.

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