

New effort to spot human trafficking in Houston

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HOUSTON (KTRK) -- Human trafficking is a significant but hard to spot problem in Houston -- and across Texas. Now a new effort is underway to raise awareness, including an entire month dedicated to educating people about it.

Houston is, unfortunately, a hub for human trafficking, which usually involves young women brought here for prostitution because of our proximity to the Mexican border.

The statistics are staggering -- a quarter of all trafficking victims rescued in the US are found in Texas, a large percentage in Houston. Local, state and federal representatives are supporting the Houston Rescue and Restore group's efforts to fight this problem.

Recently 30 local cantinas and massage parlors in the area were shut down because of this problem. But for every one that is closed, authorities say there are dozens more in existence.

It's estimated that less than one percent of child trafficking victims are ever rescued. Victims are reluctant to go to police because many are in the country illegally or they are runaways. Civil rights leaders called on the public to report anything they that may indicate trafficking is going on, and for congress to renew the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, which provides funding for the rescue and recovery of minors who are victims.

Congressman Ted Poe supports the bipartisan bill, saying these children are not being handled properly.

He said, "They are treated through the criminal justice system, the juvenile court system. Law enforcement files prostitution case on that primarily young woman, and she goes through the criminal justice system."

County Attorney Vince Ryan added that as a sign of the times, social media sites like Facebook are even being used to attract customers to the human trafficking market, so if you see something suspicious online, you're asked to report it to your local police.

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