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### Kansas human trafficking measure signed into law

By JOHN MILBURN, Associated Press  
Updated 2:51 pm, Monday, April 22, 2013

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TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Gov. Sam Brownback signed a new law Monday designed to strengthen efforts in Kansas to combat human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of young women.

The governor was joined by Attorney General Derek Schmidt and other victim advocates during the event, saying the new provisions will provide increased criminal penalties and services for victims

of sexual exploitation. The law takes effect July 1.

"This will not only strengthen our ability to severely punish traffickers, it will give us valuable new tools to protect vulnerable young victims so they can have hope of a new life and break a cycle of exploitation," Brownback said.

The bill creates the crime of commercial sexual exploitation of a child, covering those ages 14 to 17. It also makes other modifications to Kansas human trafficking laws passed nearly a decade earlier.

Commercial sexual exploitation would be a felony punishable with a minimum 25-year prison sentence if the victim is under age 14 and would have to register for life as a sexually violent offender. Fines of up to \$5,000 would be collected and used to fund victim treatment services.

The attorney general's office said prosecutors would still have the latitude to use the state's existing rape laws in prosecuting the crimes involving victims under the age of consent, but the new law elevates the severity of punishment for purchasing sexual relations.

For example, under the old law, someone convicted of purchasing sex with a 17-year-old faced a misdemeanor charge with presumptive probation. That changes now to felony conviction with a sentencing range of 50 to 55 months in prison and fine of up to \$5,000.

"Another piece of it is to start changing the conversation, the nomenclature of how we talk about these crimes," Schmidt said. "At the end of the day, every child who becomes a trafficking victim is just that, a victim of a crime. Although they may have engaged in conduct that is of itself is against the law, that's a byproduct."

Supporters said the changes addressed a gap in Kansas laws that offered less protection to young women. Those age 13 and under would be covered by the state's Jessica's Law,

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which carries a mandatory 25 years in prison for those convicted of the crime.

The bill will establish a fund that will be financed with fines and forfeiture of property from those convicted of the sex crimes. The revenue will be used to pay for treatment and services for the victims of the crimes.

Karen Countryman-Roswurm, executive director of the [Wichita State University Center for Combating Human Trafficking](#), said she hoped the center would be at the forefront of providing training and resources to law enforcement and social service agencies who will work with victims and young people.

"I think ultimately this law will help decrease the risk of young people in Kansas to be trafficked. I think this sends a message to perpetrators in our state 'not in our state, not our children.' That decreases the risk," she said.

Schmidt, a former Republican Senate majority leader, joined Brownback in January in proposing the human trafficking changes. Brownback worked on federal trafficking laws in the [U.S. Senate](#) with the late Minnesota Democratic Sen. [Paul Wellstone](#).

Efforts to increase penalties for human trafficking have been in the works for about two years, Schmidt said, building on the work of his predecessors in the attorney general's office to raise the issue's profile.

The attorney general said it was difficult to know the extent of human sex trafficking, since often it is a crime that takes place in the shadows, but affects all regions of the state. He has argued that with the new law that Kansas would be a more active partner in cracking down on the crimes under the new legislation.

"This is the first comprehensive anti-human trafficking law in Kansas history. As we have throughout our state's history, Kansas today took another positive step in the struggle for human dignity," Schmidt said.

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Text of human trafficking legislation: <http://bit.ly/17e6Gx9>

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