**Human Trafficking and Covid 19**

As many know, January is National Human Trafficking Awareness Month. A time to increase awareness across the globe that Modern Day Slavery exists worldwide, in the United States, and right here in our beautiful but small state of Connecticut.

For almost a year, one of the dominant discussions has been the worldwide pandemic, and rightfully so. The pandemic has created many challenges that, at times, are insurmountable. Among the challenges, there has been an extraordinary economic impact; families struggle to pay their bills and put food on the table. Education for children is challenging, often dependent on homeschooling and online learning. As a result, we see exploiters, extortionists, and traffickers target the most vulnerable globally; the United States and Connecticut are no exceptions.

In Connecticut, we are seeing children targeted right in their own homes. Children who never had access to the internet, technology, social media, APPS, and online platforms have these exciting tools to assist in learning during the pandemic, maintaining social connection and child entertainment. At the same time, children are now accessible to people wanting to do them harm. These exploiters, extortionists, traffickers are right in our own homes, in the homes of the families we work so hard to support every day, and right in the classrooms of our children. We have seen many such examples over the last several months of Connecticut’s children targeted in spaces that should be safe, their homes and schools. Children are being groomed, threatened, manipulated into sharing their personal information, exploited images, and even meeting in-person outside of their homes.

Although we have not seen any specific cases in Connecticut clearly linked to Covid 19 and labor trafficking, the vulnerabilities exist to make families targets for these traffickers. These vulnerabilities include unemployment, financial instability, homelessness, food insecurity, social isolation, and lack of childcare.

The National Human Trafficking Awareness Month comes at the most critical time to educate, learn, and partner to protect Connecticut’s children and families. Let’s share our knowledge with our co-workers, families, parents/ guardians, children, and neighbors to give them the information to stay safe during these most challenging times.

There are resources for parents on internet safety and educational opportunities to learn how to identify and protect children; these resources are also great for educators and are being implemented in some of our schools. There are opportunities to educate youth ages 12 and up on internet safety and child trafficking; children had told us they wished they learned about trafficking before they were victims. There is a new training on labor trafficking that has already resulted in identifying labor trafficking in Connecticut; education is vital to increasing the identification of victims that have gone unnoticed.

Attached and below are several resources. Events, training, educational opportunities continue to be added; if you would like to be added to the HART distribution list, please email DCFHART@ct.gov. The department has knowledgeable and passionate HART Leads and Liaisons in every region and office to support possible cases of child trafficking (list attached). Please also feel free to contact me at any time for assistance, tammy.sneed@ct.gov.

* App Guide for Parents (English)
* App Guide for Parents (Spanish)
* Internet Safety Materials: [For Families | Internet Safety Concepts](https://internetsafetyconcepts.com/for-families/)
* Available Training: HT Training Descriptions, email DCFHART@ct.gov to request a training
* DCF HART Page: [HART (Human Anti-trafficking Response Team) (ct.gov)](https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/HART/Home)
* HART Lead and Liaison List