

# Human Trafficking

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*Report to the Legislative Research Commission*

Department for Community Based Services  
Cabinet for Health and Family Services

November 1, 2023

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## **Introduction**

In accordance with Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 620.029(2)(b), the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (cabinet/CHFS) submits an annual report outlining the cabinet's response for child victims of human trafficking. This report details the cabinet's efforts to implement the requirements of the Human Trafficking Victims' Rights Act of 2013 (Act), which includes ensuring the safety of child victims, collaboration with multiple agencies during investigations and response, and the continuation of efforts to increase staff skill level to better serve victims. The report provides data regarding the number of reports received involving an alleged child victim of human trafficking, assessment findings, and services provided.

## **Section I: DCBS Human Trafficking Program Overview**

The cabinet's Department for Community Based Services (department/DCBS) works closely with numerous community partners including law enforcement, service providers, and other professionals to build a stronger community-based response to human trafficking cases. DCBS staff regularly attend Human Trafficking Task Force and Coalition meetings across the state, such as the Kentucky Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force, Northern Kentucky Violence Prevention Task Force, and the Lexington Human Trafficking Coalition meetings. Department staff also participate in subcommittees related to victim services. The cabinet investigates all allegations of human trafficking about individuals under the age of 18, regardless of the perpetrator's status as a caretaker or non-caretaker, per KRS 620.030(3).

The 2023 reporting period marked the third year of the cabinet's use of awarded funds from the Office for Victims of Crimes (OVC) for the Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking Initiative. In 2022, DCBS implemented two trainings for DCBS staff, community partners, and caregivers of child survivors: Human Trafficking 101: An Overview and Screening and Identification of Human Trafficking. Throughout 2023, DCBS continued to work with OVC and other community partners on the Improving Outcomes grant, to implement trainings for field staff and community partners and tools to help with service provision for survivors and those at risk of human trafficking. DCBS received final approval from the OVC on the Young Child Screen for (sex and labor) Trafficking/Exploitation (YCSTE). This is a new screening tool that has been created through partnership with Dr. Jordan Greenbaum, Medical Director of the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children in Atlanta, for the Improving Outcomes grant, to screen children under the age of 13 for the potential risk of human trafficking. This is the first screener of its kind to be targeted toward younger children. DCBS will begin piloting this screener in early 2024.

## **Section II: Kentucky Human Trafficking Child Victim Investigations**

### **Historical Data**

Each reporting period begins on October 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on September 30<sup>th</sup> of the following year. Between reporting periods 2013 and 2023 there have been 1,827 reports of alleged human trafficking involving 2,202 alleged child victims made to the agency. Historically, the cabinet has received more reports in the Jefferson Service Region. This is likely due to the larger population as well as the number of placement facilities located within Jefferson County.

Reports of alleged human trafficking have increased since 2013. Since his time as Attorney General, Governor Andy Beshear has made fighting human trafficking and increasing awareness of it a core mission. He has worked with community partners and organizations to increase awareness of human trafficking and signs of human trafficking to help law

enforcement officers and citizens be vigilant about noticing and reporting it. As Attorney General, Governor Beshear's Department of Criminal Investigations partnered with the Polaris Project and the Kentucky State Police to streamline responses to reports, including reports to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888). Then-Attorney General Beshear also attributed accomplishments in fighting human trafficking to federal grants like the three-year \$1.5 million U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Office of Justice Programs grant his office received in partnership with the Catholic Charities of Louisville in 2016, which assisted agencies and the Kentucky Human Trafficking Task Force in researching and collecting data, educating local law enforcement and increasing direct victim services. His Attorney General's office also teamed with the Transit Authority of River City (TARC) to train hundreds of TARC managers, dispatchers, and bus drivers on identifying and reporting human trafficking, and his Office of Victim's Advocacy trained thousands of people in victim advocacy services. Governor Beshear also formed a partnership with the Truckers Against Trafficking Coalition in 2016 to offer training for drivers and truck stop employees to recognize and report human trafficking. His office did the same with the hotel industry to train employees and pulled together other groups like the Kentucky Baptist Convention to help in the fight.

Governor Beshear and the Kentucky State Police annually recognize January as Human Trafficking Prevention Month, and First Lady Brittainy Beshear serves on the National Coalition of Human Sex Trafficking and continually urges Kentuckians to watch for signs of human trafficking. In 2021 Governor Beshear announced the Commonwealth received a \$1 million U.S. Department of Justice grant to help the Department for Community Based Services engage with agencies that serve children to develop and implement a council on human trafficking prevention and awareness, launch a human trafficking and child labor screening tool to identify high-risk children, and hire a full-time child protection specialist. In September 2021 the Kentucky State Police were part of a multistate human trafficking sting called Operation United Front that rescued 21 victims and led to the arrest of 41 people. The Kentucky State Police organized and led Kentucky's effort in Bowling Green, Elizabethtown, McCracken County and northern Kentucky. All of these efforts have helped Kentuckians become more aware of human trafficking to report alleged trafficking when they think they see signs of it.

### Current Reporting Period

DCBS received 392 reports of alleged human trafficking in the 2023 reporting period. This is a 14% increase in reports from the previous reporting period. These reports involved 489 alleged child victims, including both sex and labor trafficking. This is a 20% increase in number of reported victims. Of the 392 reports received, 375 reports involved sex trafficking, 16 reports involved labor trafficking, and one report contained both labor and sex trafficking allegations.

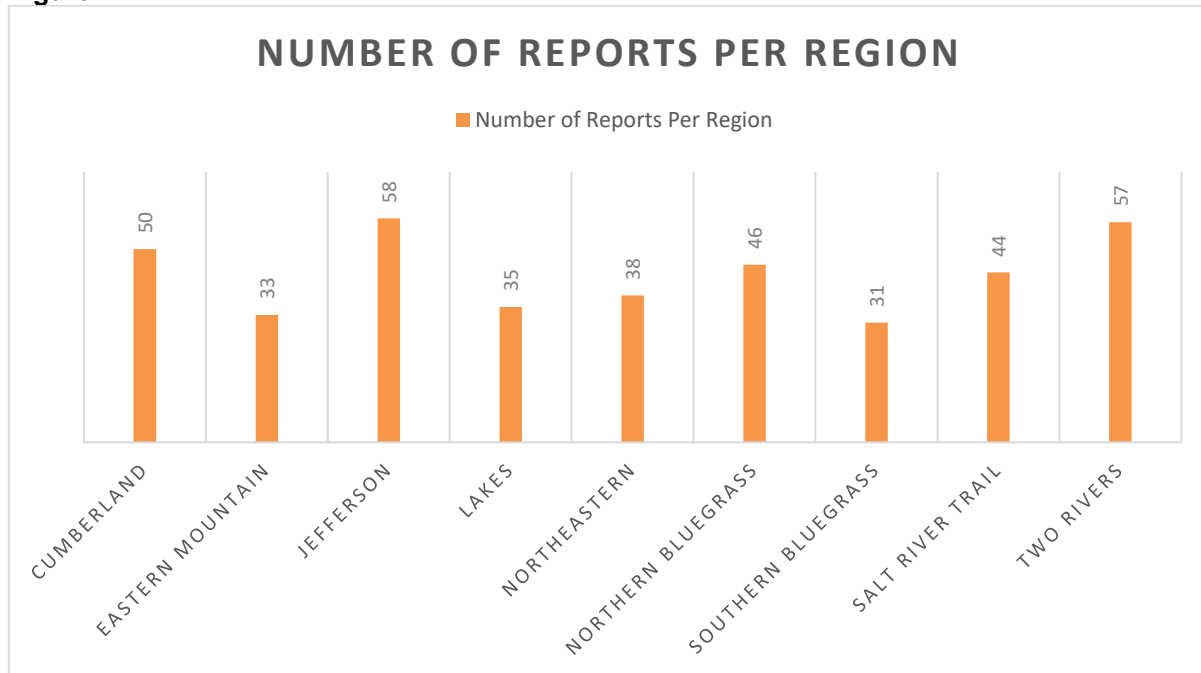
Some of these allegations included:

- Familial sex trafficking involving drugs, money, or something else of value;
- Children forced to participate in "survival sex" activities to acquire basic needs such as shelter, food, etc.;
- Children being solicited for child sexual abuse material (CSAM) through online platforms and social media;
- Children being forced to work while their pay is withheld; and
- Children being defrauded in regard to work and other activities.

## Geographic Area

During this reporting period, the Jefferson Service Region received 58 reports of child trafficking the Two Rivers Service Region received 57 reports. Cumberland Service Region had the third highest number of reports at 50. Figure 1 details the number of reports received across all nine of the DCBS service regions and indicates that human trafficking is an issue impacting urban, suburban, and rural communities in Kentucky. Six out of the nine service regions saw an increase in reports received, with the largest increase in reports from reporting year 2022 to 2023 being the Two Rivers Service Region.

Figure 1



## Victim Demographics

For this reporting period, there were approximately 382 female alleged victims, 89 male alleged victims, five alleged victims who identify as transgender, and 13 alleged victims where this information is still pending or unknown. This reporting year, the cabinet saw the number of male alleged victims being reported increase by 36%.

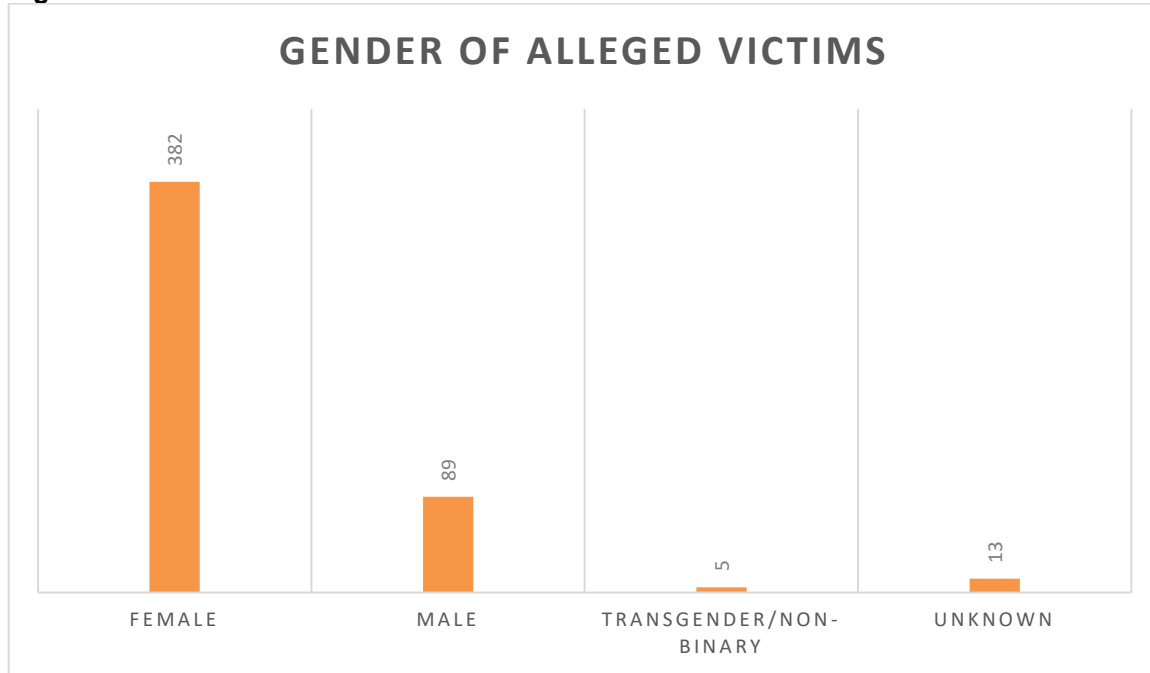
While most reports involved American-born alleged victims, the cabinet received several reports regarding children who were foreign-born. DCBS received reports involving 467 American-born children and reports involving 22 foreign-born children.

The victims' ages ranged from under one year to 18. There are 22 alleged victims where the age is still unknown, as these allegations contained unknown children with unknown ages. There is one case involving one alleged victim that at the time the report was made the age was unknown, but as the investigation was worked the individual's age was determined to be 18. The average age of the victim for this reporting period was 13 years old.

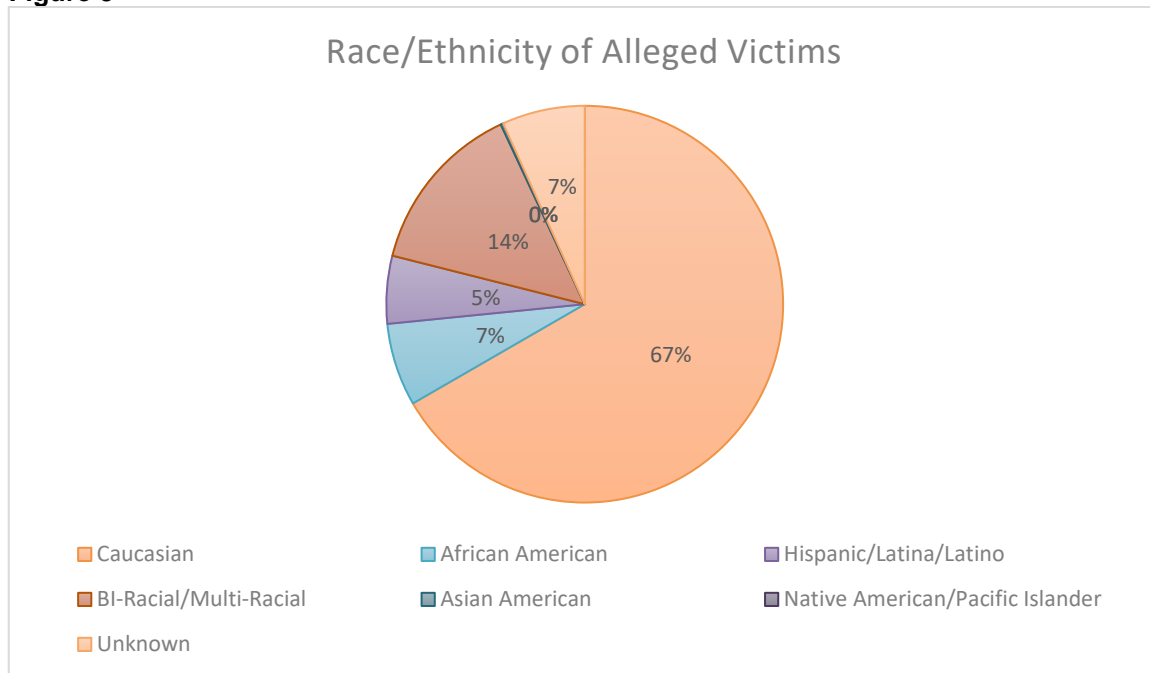
During this reporting period, 372 alleged victims were found to have had previous child welfare history within the last five years, 153 alleged victims had been the victim of substantiated abuse or neglect within the last five years, and 41 alleged victims had been the victim of substantiated sexual abuse within their lifetime.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 provide data by the alleged victims' gender, race/ethnicity, and country of origin.

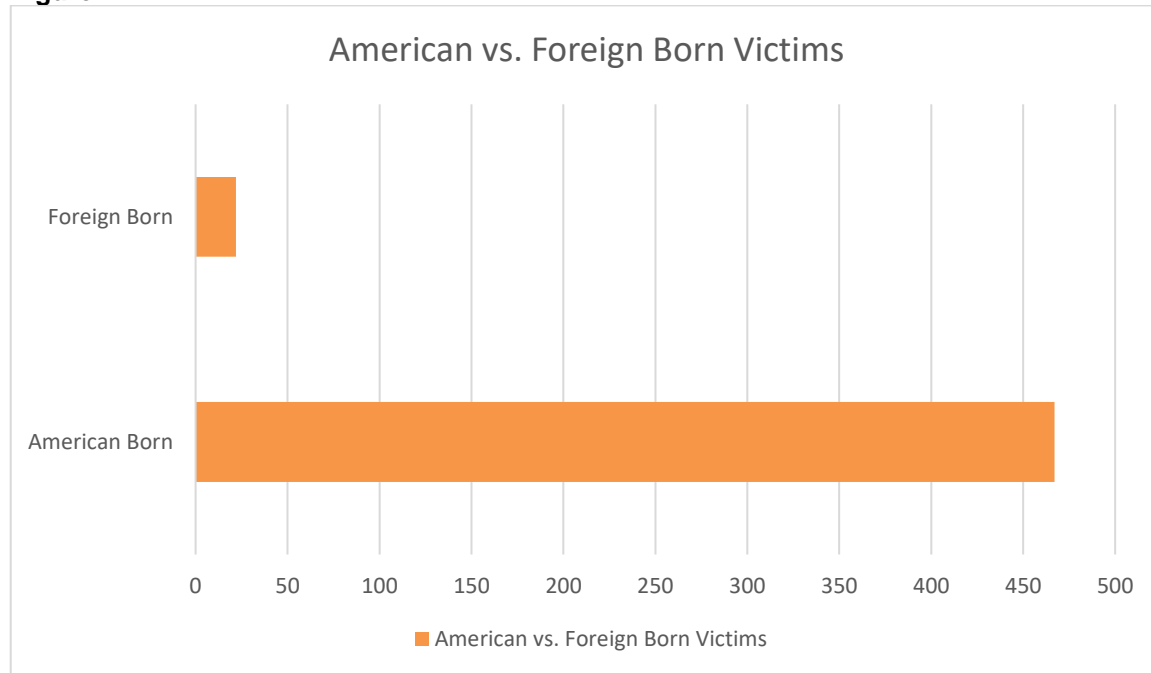
**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



### Victim Placement

Of the 392 reports received regarding 489 alleged victims, 280 were in their home of origin when the allegations of trafficking were reported, 13 were in DCBS foster care, 35 were in private child-placing (PCP) foster care, 87 were with a relative or fictive kin caregiver, 20 were in detention, 22 were in a private child-caring (PCC) placement, 18 were in a hospital, four were listed as homeless/unaccompanied minor, and 10 were listed as missing or absent from their placement at the time the allegations were received. Notably, although the disclosure or report was made while the child was placed in this setting, the maltreatment may have occurred in a previous setting.

Throughout the reporting period, 16 alleged victims were removed from their home due to safety threats related to allegations of human trafficking. Thirteen of these 16 alleged victims were removed due to the human trafficking allegations and another reason, such as a dependency action to ensure the child received services, or concerns of abuse or neglect within the home environment, etc. There were 272 children involved in allegations of human trafficking who were not removed from their home; however, some of those alleged victims were already in an alternative placement when the allegations were disclosed. Currently, placement information is pending verification for 201 alleged victims. DCBS Child Protection Branch staff are working directly with each service region to confirm information to ensure accurate data is reported. Placement settings for the children who were removed consist of relative or fictive kin caregivers, DCBS foster care, PCP foster care, and PCC facilities.

### Assessment Findings

The commercial exchange of illegal substances was identified in the trafficking of 176 children. These substances included alcohol, marijuana and marijuana/THC related products, methamphetamines, nicotine products, etc.

As of the date of this report, criminal charges have been filed against perpetrators in 31 cases of reported human trafficking and no criminal charges were filed in 147 cases. Information



related to criminal charges is pending in 214 cases due to the nature of these investigations. Some of the criminal charges associated with these cases include promoting a minor under the age of 16 in a sex performance, use of a minor under the age of 18 in a sexual performance, human trafficking-commercial sexual activity, distribution of matter portraying sex performance by a minor, sexual abuse, rape, sodomy, unlawful transaction with a minor, incest, production of child pornography, receipt of child pornography, and more.

The cabinet has worked jointly with law enforcement agencies, including local police departments, local sheriff's offices, state police, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), utilizing a multidisciplinary approach to ensure the safety of the victims, integrity of the joint investigations, and provision of the most appropriate services to the victims and their families/caregivers.

DCBS partnered with Evident Change to develop and implement Structured Decision Making® (SDM®) assessments for use during child welfare interventions. In April 2022, the SDM® Intake Assessment Tool was launched to assist and support central intake staff in making consistent, accurate, and equitable decisions when screening allegations received by the agency. As a part of this implementation process, DCBS' Standards of Practice (SOP) changes associated with the implementation process, and to adhere to the expectations set forth by the Children's Bureau, reports are now entered separately based on caretaker status. The Worker's Information SysTem (TWIST), Kentucky's Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), was updated to reflect these changes to ensure caretaker perpetrators and non-caretaker perpetrators are not included within the same intake. This is a potential explanation for the increase in the number of reports received during this reporting period.

A caretaker was alleged to be the perpetrator of human trafficking in 166 cases. Examples of caretakers include parents (biological and adoptive), relatives, a non-relative caretaker, older siblings, babysitters/care providers, parent paramours, etc. There is a 10% decrease in the number of caretaker reports in 2023 when compared to the 2022 reporting year, at 185 caretaker perpetrators.

A non-caretaker was alleged to be the perpetrator of human trafficking in 225 cases. Examples of non-caretaker perpetrators include parent paramours, other children/peers, non-relatives, child's significant other, siblings, family member's substance dealer, family friends, traffickers, buyers, etc. This is a nearly 15% increase in non-caretaker perpetrators in 2023 compared to reporting year 2022, at 194 non-caretaker perpetrators.

In 120 cases, the alleged perpetrator had child welfare history within the last five years. Of those 120 cases, in 41 of the cases, the alleged perpetrator had child abuse or neglect substantiated against them within the past five years. In 11 of the 392 reports received this reporting period, the alleged perpetrator had child sexual abuse substantiated against them during their lifetime.

This is not an exhaustive list of the perpetrators and their relationships with the child and/or family in any given reporting period. Table 1 illustrates the findings during this reporting period.



**Table 1 Human Trafficking Investigative Findings** *(Reporting period 2023)*

<b>Caretaker</b>		<b>Non-Caretaker</b>	
Substantiated	32	Human Trafficking Confirmed	50
Unsubstantiated	61	Human Trafficking Not Confirmed	72
Pending	72	Pending	103
Services Needed	1	No Findings	1
Total	166	Total	226

The provision of services related to trafficking is not contingent on substantiated findings. The cabinet offers/provides services to all alleged victims of trafficking. Some of these services include placement in out-of-home care; forensic interviews and medical exams through children’s advocacy centers; trauma-informed screening and assessment; individual, family, and group therapy; and exploitation prevention education. Families/caregivers of survivors participated in services related to therapeutic intervention for trauma, substance use, and parenting, among other things. Specialists on the Child Protection, Clinical Services, and Out-of-Home Care branches provide consultation and guidance on a case-by-case basis to ensure that each child/family is connected with appropriate services and supports to meet their unique needs.

### **Section III: Conclusions and Program Enhancement**

The cabinet continues to utilize a multidisciplinary approach to address allegations of human trafficking, collaborating with community partners ranging from law enforcement, mental health professionals, medical treatment providers, among others, to ensure that victims receive the most appropriate services and supports. Specialists in the DCBS Child Protection Branch consult with field personnel, as needed, to provide guidance and technical assistance during the assessment process. Children participate in forensic interviews at children’s advocacy centers, as necessary, for trafficking cases per Kentucky statute. During reporting year 2023, 215 children were interviewed at children’s advocacy centers, 141 children were not interviewed at children’s advocacy centers, and this information is pending for 43 children. The cabinet notifies law enforcement of every report of human trafficking it receives. The cabinet worked jointly on 243 human trafficking cases during the current reporting period.

As part of the OVC-funded Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking Initiative, the cabinet and its training partners plan to release additional trainings in the coming year. These trainings will enhance and inform a coordinated response to human trafficking by child-serving professionals in Kentucky. Updated department policies related to screening for human trafficking, supported by additional training, are forthcoming. The cabinet anticipates an increase in identification of human trafficking victims, which corresponds with an increase in screening, training, and other efforts. As an increase of awareness continues to focus on providing appropriate, trauma-informed services to victims, the cabinet is confident an increase in reports will occur. Increased identification of human trafficking and assessment of victims’ and families’ needs will support the development of a robust service array to meet the needs of these survivors in their home communities.