



Minal Davis Testimony

Senate State Affairs Committee

Joan Huffman, Chair

February 26, 2020

Last year, the City of Houston issued our two-year Local Impact Report and said that we look forward to working with our partners to examine how our local response can impact trafficking globally. I am proud to say that our innovative local response has become the national, and soon-to-be international model for other cities through our first-of-its-kind Human Trafficking Response Ten/Ten Municipal Fellowship.

While we impact cities in the U.S. and abroad, we continue to be vigilant in addressing the issue in Houston.

- Our progress at home is clear: we have completed 93% of tactics outlined in Phase One of my office's Strategic Plan and 65% of Phase Two.

Tactics we completed not only initiate behavioral and systems change at the City of Houston through actions like Mayor Sylvester Turner's Executive Order to combat labor trafficking in our supply chain, but also ensure victims and those at-risk have access to shelter, case management, medical and mental health care referrals, and the potential for longer-term housing options.

As we continue to make progress in our municipal response and work with Ten/Ten cities and nation states in building up their own efforts, I look forward to seeing a strong network of neighbor cities whose robust trafficking responses benefit us all.

- The City of Houston mobilized eight departments or divisions comprising 1,535 critical employees to address trafficking based on five engagement types. Further, we assessed 11 total city departments/divisions for opportunity. We leveraged city departments' and divisions' existing day-to-day duties to incorporate a trafficking response and added multiple ways to implement policies, recognize and report, regulate, screen and refer, and self-recognize and report, supplementing traditional local law enforcement efforts.
- The City engaged 35 corporations to address supply-chain risks to trafficking and forced labor during Conscientious Capitalism.

- We created a long-standing shelter collaborative that provided beds for 147 potential trafficking victims (and increase of 57) who spent 5,386 nights (an increase of 3,729). Twenty victims secured housing. Through our shelter collaborative, we addressed an existing services gap for on-demand shelter bed access for potential victims our non-profit partners encountered in crisis.

The Mayor's Office leveraged its legal, financial, and administrative resources needed for the collaborative, reducing the burden for partners to negotiate similar relationships with a shelter partner and increasing operational efficiency by reducing the time it previously took them to secure a shelter bed.

Because human trafficking victims, and those at-risk for trafficking, intersect with the homeless and domestic violence populations, we harnessed already existing city-wide systems to cross-screen for trafficking. Those who screen positive are offered referrals to our mayor's office case managers with access to shelter beds, case management, and medical and mental healthcare referrals. We screened a total of 1,282 adults. Of those, 79 were flagged as showing signs of human trafficking. In addition, we screened 719 homeless youth with intersecting vulnerabilities, with 55 positives, or 1 in 13 showing signs of trafficking.

Our office created a bridge to Houston's Homeless Coordinated Access System by placing two Mayor's Office case managers with our shelter partner. We identified 81 confirmed and potential victims and delivered 2,425 unique kinds of services. We placed mayor's office case managers at the shelter-level because no non-profit partner had systematic access to shelter and housing for victims. Those served not only have access to needs-based social services, but they also undergo a housing intake by the shelter and now have access to the city's coordinated housing stock.

We placed a Human Trafficking Psychology Fellow at the county hospital. The fellow received 122 referrals (an increase of 66) and identified 98 victims (an increase of 70). We also placed a hospital-based case manager who works jointly with our fellow.

Before our psychology fellow, service providers lacked easy access to psychological services for victims, and healthcare settings were not systematically utilized for screening. Now, our healthcare partner, Harris Health NPC, screens and refers clients to our mayor's office case managers and provides psychological services to our non-profit partners' clients.

Beyond our city limits, the City of Houston empowered cities and organizations through access to eight initiative-specific online toolkits, which were downloaded 303 times across 118 U.S. cities, 31 states, and 5 countries.

- Houston was the first municipality with a dedicated, senior-level staff person directly reporting to the mayor, and we needed a means for effective information and resource-sharing for other U.S. cities and organizations wanting to follow our lead. We empower others by providing easy online access to our resources with select items capable of being modified by users to meet their area's needs.

Our work to implement Mayor Turner's Strategic Plan culminated in the first international Human Trafficking Response Ten/Ten Municipal Fellowship in July 2019 with executive-level participants from governments and cities.

- Twenty-four senior-level staff from 18 mayor's offices and one state participated in our two-day human trafficking immersion program so they can identify and implement priorities and initiatives in their own cities.

It solidified Houston as a solution hub and municipal anti-trafficking model and changed the national and local narrative about Houston with press coverage from coast-to-coast. The domestic Ten/Ten Fellowship was covered in *The Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Dallas Morning News*, and several others.

Our work to address human trafficking in Houston using new and innovative approaches and empowering other cities resulted in the highest U.S. award — the Presidential Award for Extraordinary Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons — leading Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to say “[Houston] now boasts one of the most comprehensive and forward-leaning anti-trafficking programs anywhere in the United States.”