

Panelist Testimony in Response to the Maine Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights briefing on Human Trafficking

April 2, 2012

Members of the Maine Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, my name is Arian Giantris, and I represent the Refugee & Immigration Services program of Catholic Charities Maine, which has been helping refugees rebuild their lives in Maine for over 30 years.

I am here to share my perspective on the issue of human trafficking based on my experiences working in this field both overseas and in the state of Maine.

Prior to joining Catholic Charities' staff, I worked for three and half years as the Anti-Trafficking Advisor for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) office in Tirana, Albania. Between 2003 and 2006, I managed the implementation of \$7 million in federal funding to support the prevention, protection, voluntary return, and reintegration of trafficked women and children in Albania and across its borders. When I returned to the United States, I pursued work in this field and found that the U.S. investment in anti-trafficking work overseas far exceeded what it was spending or identifying as a problem within its own borders.

Despite improvements to U.S. federal law and funding in the last six years, public awareness on this issue and adequate resources for victims and victim service providers remain weak. The United States remains the largest destination country for foreign victims of trafficking, who once inside its borders, become lost and virtually undetected within our cities, states, and counties. Like other countries, the United States is also seeing a rampant increase in domestic trafficking victims, who have been born and raised in this country. As a nation and as a state, it is clear that we are not immune from this human scourge.

I have worked for the Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services program since 2007; and have been its Director since 2008. In this position I oversee all staff and resettlement programming related to services to primary and secondary migrant refugees, as well as asylees in Maine. RIS has actively sought to incorporate services for victims of trafficking into our agency profile since 2007, because we recognized that federally certified victims of human trafficking are entitled to the same level of federal benefits (financial, food stamps, and medical) as a refugee and should be supported in accessing these benefits.

In the summer of 2009, RIS and the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) each applied for and were awarded subcontracts from Project Reach, a Boston based NGO, to assist in building a New England Coalition Against Human Trafficking. In its two years of implementation, we trained 549 Maine providers, law enforcement, and citizens from York to Caribou on the issue of human trafficking. We provided 2,000 items of outreach materials, including posters, brochures, red flag cards, hotline numbers, and screening tools for victim identification & referral. While it was the start of important awareness raising, it was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of public awareness needs throughout the

state. RIS continues to play an integral role in the outreach and service delivery planning of identified trafficking victims and is a member of Maine's state level Anti-Trafficking Work Group and the recently formed Greater Portland Coalition Against Sex Trafficking and Labor Exploitation.

RIS held a federal subcontract with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to provide direct per capita assistance and funding to pre and certified victims of human trafficking from 2009-2011. Services included safety planning, financial assistance, case management, health and legal services referrals. When USCCB lost the national services to victims of trafficking contract, RIS was not awarded a subcontract by the new contract holder and our services are now limited to working with certified only victims of human trafficking in ensuring access to federal benefits and providing general employment assistance. RIS remains Maine's primary point of contact to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) which houses the Polaris Project's National Human Trafficking Hotline.

To date, RIS has served a handful of identified trafficking victims, the majority of which have been exploited through labor trafficking. While these clients have benefited greatly from case management services and federal assistance, we believe there are far greater numbers of people who are living and working in fear in Maine; and being exploited for sex or labor services.

Given Maine's water and Canadian borders, rural landscape, destination for tourism, and large numbers of migrant workers during various harvest seasons in isolated Northern and Downeast Maine, the state needs to focus more efforts on increasing outreach to potentially vulnerable groups and communities at risk of exploitation, while actively educating native Maine residents about this crime in their communities. This effort cannot occur in only Cumberland and Androscoggin counties, but should be talked about in every community throughout the state of Maine.

One key action which would place this issue at the forefront of prosecutorial and social policy agendas would be to create a Maine anti- trafficking law. Without one, Maine can't prosecute defendants as human traffickers. Its prosecutions can't reflect outcomes that speak to the number of human trafficking cases pursued, won, and level of sentencing handed down. Victims cannot be given the full range of support services and compensation to which they are entitled. All of these factors are important to federal agencies who are seeking to support such quantifiable state efforts through their annual anti-trafficking grant awards.

Right now Maine can simply not compete for federal dollars to support the level of coordinated care and interventions that are truly needed to support victims in becoming survivors. While collaborations among small groups of Maine providers have emerged, and which unlike other states, have embraced a comprehensive and coordinated effort between law enforcement (local and federal) and services providers, without resources to strengthen the network and provide adequate shelter; ongoing case management; legal and social support services; we will continue to underserve the great needs of the victims we are currently encountering and the countless others who remain unidentified and living in the shadows. Without a Maine anti-trafficking law, the traffickers will continue to remain 10 steps ahead of our efforts, suffering few repercussions for their actions, while callously exploiting their victims for sex or labor.

On behalf of Catholic Charities Maine Refugee & Immigration Services and the clients we serve, I thank you for taking the time to hold this panel and to hear insights and experiences from a diverse group of providers, law enforcement, advocates and lawyers, all working together to better serve the needs of Maine's human trafficking victims, both foreign and U.S. born. It has been said many times before that this is a global problem and a billion dollar industry from which no community is immune. Maine is no exception. Despite our efforts to date, Maine is a ripe picking ground for traffickers of some of Maine's most vulnerable residents. I hope this briefing will lead to some proactive next steps to support the good work and collaborations that are already underway in Maine and enhance services to support the individuals most at-risk in our communities.

Thank you.

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