

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Monday, December 8, 2025
2:10 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN NINA AHMAD, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILMAN MIKE DRISCOLL
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU
COUNCILMAN NICOLAS O'ROURKE

BILL: 250990

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COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

Good afternoon. Welcome to
Philadelphia City Council's
Committee on Public Health and
Human Services. I now note that
the hour has come.

Mr. Sham, would you
please call the roll?

(Brief recess.)

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

Mr. Sham, would you please call the
roll.

THE CLERK: Chair Ahmad.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

Present.

THE CLERK: Vice-Chair

Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Thomas.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

1 Councilmember Driscoll.

2 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

3 Present.

4 THE CLERK:

5 Councilmember Bass.

6 (No response.)

7 THE CLERK:

8 Councilmember Landau.

9 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

10 Present.

11 THE CLERK: And,

12 Councilmember O'Rourke.

13 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:

14 Present.

15 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I

16 note for the record that a quorum

17 of this committee is present and

18 this hearing is called to order.

19 This is a public hearing of the

20 Committee of Public Health and

21 Human Services considering

22 testimony on Bill No. 250990.

23 Mr. Sham, would you

24 please read the title of the bill.

1 THE CLERK: Bill No.
2 250990, amending Chapter 9-1100 of
3 The Philadelphia Code, entitled
4 "Fair Practices Ordinance
5 Protections Against Unlawful
6 Discrimination," to add protections
7 against employment discrimination
8 on the basis of human trafficking
9 victim status, all under certain
10 terms and conditions.

11 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
12 Before we call up the first panel,
13 I'm recognizing myself for opening
14 remarks and then I will hand it
15 over to any other colleague who
16 would like to make remarks.

17 Good afternoon,
18 everybody, and thank you all for
19 being here. Today's hearing is on
20 Bill 250990, which would add human
21 trafficking victim status to the
22 list of protected categories under
23 our Fair Practices Ordinance on its
24 face. This is a change of the

1 Code. But in real life, it's about
2 whether survivors are allowed a
3 fair chance to rebuild.

4 We know that trafficking
5 does not happen in a vacuum. It
6 almost always comes with violence,
7 often against women. Nationally,
8 more than 1 in 3 women experience
9 physical or sexual violence or
10 stalking in their lifetime. Here
11 in Pennsylvania, that figure is
12 just as alarming. Last year alone,
13 71 women were killed in domestic
14 violence incidents across the
15 Commonwealth.

16 What's even more
17 difficult is that most survivors
18 never see justice in the
19 traditional sense. Fewer than 5%
20 of sexual assaults are ever
21 reported. Out of 1000 rapes, only
22 about 7 lead to a felony
23 conviction. That is not because
24 harm isn't happening. It's because

1 the system is profoundly hard for
2 survivors to navigate. So when
3 someone finally escapes
4 trafficking, they're already
5 carrying an unbelievable weight.
6 And then too often, we ask them to
7 explain gaps in employment,
8 disruption in housing or
9 interactions with the legal system
10 without offering any protections
11 from discrimination tied to their
12 victimization.

13 People should not lose
14 job opportunities because of what
15 someone else did to them. This
16 bill says something very simple and
17 very necessary: Surviving
18 trafficking should not follow you
19 into a job interview. It should
20 not be used against you when you're
21 trying to work to provide and to
22 move forward.

23 We are here today to
24 hear from advocates and survivors

1 about how discrimination shows up
2 after trafficking and why this
3 protection matters in everyday
4 life. My hope is that we stay
5 honest about the scale of violence
6 we are dealing with and equally
7 clear about our obligations to
8 remove barriers where we can.

9 Thank you everyone who took the
10 time to testify today.

11 Before I begin, we
12 begin, I would like to provide the
13 number for the National Human
14 Trafficking Hotline and the local
15 Salvation Army New Day to stop
16 trafficking hotline. The first
17 one, which is the National Human
18 Trafficking Hotline, is
19 1-888-373-7888. Once again,
20 1-888-373-7888.

21 And for the Salvation
22 Army New Day to Stop Trafficking
23 Hotline is 267-838-5866,
24 267-838-5866. Thank you.

1 And now, if any of my
2 colleagues have any comments to
3 make. We'll go with Councilmember
4 Rue Landau.

5 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

6 Thank you so much. I just had
7 brief remarks. First, I want to
8 thank my colleague Councilwoman
9 Nina Ahmad for introducing this
10 legislation. And for me, this
11 legislation not only protects
12 categories of women, but in
13 particular it also protects
14 immigrants who are brought to the
15 country in a way of trafficking as
16 well as the LGBTQ+ community.

17 It's very important that
18 we focus on the issue and make sure
19 that we're highlighting it as
20 somebody who was a part of
21 including victims of domestic
22 violence and sexual assault in the
23 Fair Practices Ordinance, this is a
24 natural connection and a natural

1 subcategory as well of folks who
2 might not fit in there, but also
3 who really need the same
4 protections as well. So thank you.
5 I'm looking forward to hearing from
6 everyone.

7 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

8 Thank you, Councilmember Landau.
9 Anybody else?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

12 Mr. Sham, could you please call up
13 the first panel.

14 The CLERK: Noting for
15 the record that the Philadelphia
16 Commission on Human Relations
17 submitted written testimony in
18 support of Bill No. 250990.

19 First up, we have Larry
20 Krasner, District Attorney of
21 Philadelphia.

22 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

23 KRASNER: Good afternoon, and thank
24 you all for the opportunity to say

1 a few words and then address any
2 and all questions that you may have
3 on this incredibly important topic.
4 I am here today with First
5 Assistant Robert Listenbee, seated
6 to your left, my right.

7 As many of you may know,
8 Bob Listenbee's legal career has in
9 large part been spent trying to
10 protect juveniles. That's what he
11 has done ever since the early days,
12 continues to do it. He was, in
13 fact, the Chief of Juvenile Justice
14 for Barack Obama in his second term
15 as President. And seated to your
16 right, my left, is also our Chief
17 of our Family Violent Sexual
18 Assault Unit, Katrina Wadas.
19 That's W-a-d-a-s. Katrina with a
20 K, right?

21 MS. WADAS: Yes.

22 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

23 KRASNER: All right. And we are
24 delighted to be here because this

1 is an issue that we care about very
2 much. Also, somewhere nearby me is
3 Angela Lee, who does victim
4 services within our Family Violent
5 Sexual Assault Unit, and is very
6 close to some of the issues that
7 you are considering here today.

8 I'll try to keep my
9 comments brief. Number one, I
10 applaud that you don't want to
11 blame victims. Blaming victims is
12 ugly. It's wrong. It's something
13 that's been going on for a very
14 long time. And trafficking is an
15 area, whether it's labor
16 trafficking or sex trafficking,
17 where blaming the victim has been
18 routine sadly. In fact, people who
19 held my position, either in
20 Philadelphia or in other places,
21 often thought it was a good idea to
22 prosecute those who were exploited,
23 those who have survived having been
24 trafficked.

1 As I'm sure you're well
2 aware, I disagree. I think we
3 should help victims. I think we
4 should protect people. I don't
5 think we should try to crush them
6 because we don't like the conduct
7 in which they are coerced to
8 participate. So I just want to
9 start out very simply saying thank
10 you for doing this. I think it's
11 incredibly important. And
12 obviously, with the events we all
13 expect to be coming in the year
14 2026, unfortunately there is liable
15 to be a very robust opportunity for
16 the criminal exploitation of
17 people, both with sex trafficking
18 and labor trafficking, and we don't
19 want that.

20 We want to make sure
21 that people are protected, that
22 they are safe, that they are not
23 coerced, lured, forced or in any
24 other way made to do these things

1 when they should not be made to do
2 them.

3 We did a press
4 conference earlier this morning on
5 a related, but not identical issue.
6 It was about the conviction and the
7 sentencing of a defendant by the
8 name of Horace Battle. And
9 Mr. Battle lured two 11-year-old
10 girls into his car. And then,
11 needless to say, did not take them
12 where he said he was going to take
13 them. He took them to his house.
14 One of them ended up in the house.
15 The other one ended up leaving,
16 essentially, to seek help.

17 And after about 10 hours
18 of incredibly effective but
19 difficult police work, she was
20 rescued from that home where
21 unfortunately, she had already been
22 raped by this man. This is an
23 11-year-old. Her sister, also 11,
24 was traumatized obviously, horrific

1 case. And Mr. Battle is where he
2 needs to be, which is in custody
3 and where I expect him to remain
4 effectively for the rest of his
5 life.

6 You should know that he
7 did have a prior incident in 2013.
8 He was convicted and served seven
9 years in jail for a prior incident,
10 which was also a rape case. Yet
11 sadly, this occurred. We cannot
12 accept that. We cannot accept the
13 trafficking of juveniles, young
14 adults, adults. Whether it's for
15 labor or it is sex trafficking, we
16 have to protect them every way that
17 we possibly can.

18 And I'm happy to say
19 that our Family Violent Sexual
20 Assault Unit is every bit as
21 committed to the protection of
22 these 11-year-old girls as they are
23 committed to the protection of
24 girls, boys, trans people, young

1 women, whoever they are, who are
2 trafficked for whatever purpose by
3 whatever person. It is a
4 despicable crime. It's nothing
5 that we are ever going to tolerate
6 being perpetrated against the
7 public and perpetrated against
8 these individuals.

9 I will say that you
10 should know that our Family
11 Violence Sexual Assault Unit tries
12 about as many cases as our Homicide
13 and Nonfatal Shooting unit. It's
14 an extremely challenging, very
15 difficult trial practice. The
16 attorneys who are in that unit are
17 so dedicated, that it's often very
18 difficult to get them to do
19 anything else during their careers.
20 They're in love with the work and
21 they want to continue doing the
22 work.

23 So we do have an A team.
24 We have a very, very capable,

1 skilled, experienced team when it
2 comes to handling these kinds of
3 cases. I will tell you though we
4 do not all that often have referred
5 to us by the police a case against
6 a trafficker. We do have a
7 separate unit that does labor
8 trafficking, even then this is not
9 the usual bread and butter for
10 municipal police departments to
11 have a steady stream of cases
12 against, if I may use the
13 vernacular, the pimp, against the
14 exploiter, against the trafficker.

15 Historically, in the
16 United States often the cases have
17 been against the people who were
18 trafficked, and that's obviously
19 turning everything upside down.
20 That's not going to solve the
21 problem. That's just going to
22 victimize people who've already
23 been victimized.

24 So we look forward to

1 the opportunity to prosecute more
2 of these cases against traffickers.
3 We look forward to getting
4 appropriate consequences and just
5 outcomes for what is, in fact, a
6 terrible crime, and we hope that we
7 are all able to do that working
8 together.

9 Our commitment to
10 supporting victims and survivors
11 through the work of our external
12 engagement division, which includes
13 our Relocations Unit, our Victim
14 Services Unit, our CARES Unit,
15 which works with families of
16 homicide victims during the first
17 45 days after a family member has
18 been killed as well as working with
19 our nine contracted external victim
20 services agencies. I hope at this
21 point it's clear -- I understand
22 maybe eight years ago people
23 weren't so certain -- but our work
24 with them is very effective.

1 We work very closely
2 with them and we are delighted to
3 have had the opportunity to support
4 them in getting an increase in
5 their funds. Thanks to you.

6 Thanks to City Council. For the
7 first time in about 15 years -- I
8 mean seriously, it was like 15
9 years before these folks got any
10 more money. And while they
11 certainly need more than they
12 already have and more than the
13 increase that they've received, it
14 is truly appreciated that there was
15 some recognition of the importance
16 and quality of their work, which is
17 for many different kinds of
18 victims, including victims of
19 trafficking in its various forms.

20 We are so committed, in
21 fact, to working on the issues of
22 human trafficking that we submitted
23 a year ago a budget request to
24 Council to launch a DAO Human

1 Trafficking Task Force. And while
2 that did not occur last year, we've
3 submitted it again as part of our
4 midyear request in hopes that we
5 could be well-positioned to support
6 what we anticipate will be
7 potentially a real bad situation
8 next year, unless we all work
9 together.

10 And once again, I want
11 to thank Councilmember Ahmad and
12 all members of Council who are here
13 and not here for caring so deeply
14 about this issue. We remain deeply
15 committed to working with community
16 groups, faith leaders, other
17 stakeholders to see how we can
18 continue to support and serve on
19 this critical issue.

20 And with that, we
21 collectively are delighted to
22 answer any questions or address any
23 thoughts you may have.

24 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

1 Thank you so much for your
2 testimony. It was illuminating to
3 hear, difficult to hear as well
4 that in 2025 we are still having
5 11-year-old young girls picked up
6 and raped in such a short period of
7 time before they were being
8 rescued.

9 One of the questions I
10 have is about establishing this
11 explicit employment protection.
12 Would that help create a safer
13 environment for victims to disclose
14 their experiences and cooperate
15 with investigations? I don't know
16 if you encountered that as an issue
17 in your work to prosecute these
18 criminals, but I wondered if we
19 changed the environment and created
20 this kind of safe haven, at least
21 in terms of their employment, would
22 that have an impact?

23 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

24 KRASNER: The short answer is 100%

1 yes. I can certainly elaborate
2 briefly. You know, there's a very,
3 very long tradition of certain
4 people, vulnerable people,
5 marginalized people being targeted.
6 There's a long history of serial
7 killers targeting people who were
8 trafficked or had a variety of
9 other issues. It goes back
10 decades, if not centuries, in the
11 United States.

12 And we all know that
13 part of the reason for that is it
14 is difficult for them to report
15 crimes against them. So if they
16 are attacked by a serial killer, by
17 a rapist, by a strangler, whatever,
18 if they are attacked, historically
19 they haven't just been able to pick
20 up the phone and call the police,
21 because the expectation was they
22 would be arrested, they would be
23 prosecuted. They would pay some
24 consequence for that. They'd have

1 a permanent criminal record that
2 would disqualify them from almost
3 every job that would get them out
4 of the life they were trying to
5 escape.

6 So, yes, I think this
7 bill is extremely important for the
8 safety, for the rehabilitation, for
9 the necessary treatment of people
10 who have been exploited and
11 victimized. I think it's also
12 necessary for public safety period
13 that we take people who are victims
14 and we don't blame the victim. And
15 fundamentally, that is what you are
16 doing here.

17 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I'm
18 going to ask one more question and
19 then hand it over to my colleagues.
20 Are you able to say how many human
21 traffickers have been prosecuted in
22 2024 or any of these preceding
23 years?

24 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

1 KRASNER: I don't have the exact
2 number, but I can tell you the
3 flow. We prosecute these cases very
4 vigorously when we get them. We
5 get very few. Simply put, we get
6 very few of these cases. And I
7 don't say that to throw shade on
8 anyone at all. We would love to
9 have more people brought to justice
10 for this activity because we all
11 know what's going on.

12 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: So
13 the ones who do come in front of
14 you, are they able to be
15 prosecuted? And what is the outcome
16 of those prosecutions, the few that
17 you did get?

18 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

19 KRASNER: Well, I can think of one
20 in particular where you had a
21 trafficker who was forcing women
22 within a home to engage in sex
23 trafficking activity. They were
24 effectively imprisoned. One of

1 them had to actually escape in
2 order for the activity even to be
3 detected.

4 I know that that
5 prosecution resulted in a very
6 lengthy and, in my mind,
7 appropriately lengthy sentence of
8 incarceration. You're effectively
9 talking about kidnapping. You're
10 talking about unlawful restraint.
11 You're talking about people being
12 kept in what was effectively a
13 house of horrors and made to do
14 things that they did not want to do
15 in terms of being trafficked. To
16 me that's not a bad crime, that's
17 not a real bad crime. That's a
18 heinous crime that is extremely
19 serious.

20 On the other hand, the
21 people who were trafficked, of
22 course we don't want to prosecute.
23 We want to support them. We want
24 to help them. We want their

1 testimony. We want them to be able
2 to testify. And then to the extent
3 that there are ways that they can
4 be rehabilitated, they can get out
5 of life, they can take advantage of
6 other opportunities and go work
7 wherever, at a grocery store, at a
8 school, whatever it may be.

9 Obviously, that will work better if
10 they do not have a prostitution
11 conviction on their record.

12 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: And
13 the last question I have is, how
14 many of the customers of human
15 trafficking, not the people
16 trafficked and not -- we already
17 talked about the traffickers, but
18 those who are actually buying this
19 product, the johns in vernacular,
20 what has been the outcome of
21 prosecuting them?

22 Because one of the ways
23 we found for anything is you have
24 to reduce the demand in order, you

1 know, look at supply and demand.
2 If you reduce the demand, hopefully
3 will not be a place where people
4 want to come and try this trade.
5 So I wondered if you have any data
6 on that.

7 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

8 KRASNER: I have to tell you I
9 don't know when is the last time we
10 had one of them arrested. I will
11 check for you. But I do not know
12 the last time that we had a "john"
13 arrested and brought to us for the
14 purpose of prosecution. If you'll
15 give me just one second, I want to
16 check with Katrina Wadas just to
17 make sure I'm not missing something
18 here, but I haven't seen one in
19 quite a while.

20 And realistically, once
21 again not to throw shade on anyone,
22 we all understand some of the
23 crises that the city has faced and
24 the necessity of our law

1 enforcement partners making
2 decisions about what they
3 prioritize. But I cannot remember
4 the last time that anyone came to
5 me with a case involving a john.
6 That's not to say there have been
7 none, but let me see if I can get
8 you more information on that.

9 With your permission,
10 I'm going to ask Chief Wadas to say
11 a couple words on that point.

12 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
13 Absolutely. State your name.

14 MS. WADAS: Yes. Good
15 morning or good afternoon. My name
16 is Katrina Wadas. I'm Supervisor
17 of Family Violence and Sexual
18 Assault at the DA's Office. Yes,
19 to echo the DA's sentiment, there
20 hasn't been that many arrests. In
21 fact, I was saying to the DA that
22 it's probably been about a decade
23 since I've seen a real flow of
24 those cases come in. Not to say

1 that it's not happening and not to
2 say that it's not criminal, but as
3 far as arrests coming in for review
4 for prosecution, they're not being
5 referred.

6 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

7 Okay. That's frightening. And we
8 obviously have to talk to many more
9 partners in our law enforcement
10 arena to address this. Because as
11 I said, you have to reduce the
12 demand and you'd have to make it
13 uncomfortable and difficult where
14 people will not find this good
15 hunting grounds for this to occur.

16 I will yield the floor
17 to, I guess Congress -- I'm
18 elevating him -- Councilmember
19 O'Rourke.

20 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:

21 Thank you, Madam Chair.

22 You spoke to it. But if
23 you could, Mr. DA -- first of all,
24 thank you all for being here and

1 testifying. Thank you for your
2 work and your service to the city.
3 Could you speak to or circle back
4 to how this legislation could
5 actually strengthen prosecution in
6 terms of how is this going to be a
7 tool for you as you go to prosecute
8 these things as they come back to
9 you?

10 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

11 KRASNER: I'm happy to do so,
12 Councilmember, and thank you for
13 your kind words. We're delighted
14 to be here. There are many ways
15 that the system makes it hard for
16 people to report crimes against
17 them, makes it hard for people to
18 rehabilitate. We should try to
19 avoid them.

20 We actually want people
21 who have been victimized, even if
22 they are addressing other issues,
23 even if they are dealing with an
24 addiction issue, even if they are

1 in a lifestyle that is nothing they
2 want to talk about, we want to make
3 it as easy as possible for them to
4 participate against the people who
5 exploit them.

6 And one of the
7 downstream consequences of
8 traditional prosecution of these
9 folks or if they're not being
10 protected against discrimination is
11 that they don't come forward, they
12 don't participate as witnesses
13 against the people who traffick
14 them because of the downstream
15 consequences.

16 I can't get a job is a
17 real problem when the whole point
18 is to get them out of an exploited
19 situation so that they can
20 voluntarily do the kind of work
21 they want to do. I mean simply
22 put, if you're hiring somebody at
23 the grocery store and that person
24 is showing up with a criminal

1 record that says, prostitution,
2 prostitution, prostitution, they're
3 not going to get hired in an awful
4 lot of places. And that's exactly
5 the wrong message.

6 The message ought to be
7 that we are here to support
8 victims, protect victims and that
9 we are here to make sure they're
10 not discriminated against because
11 perhaps more than other groups,
12 they should have that opportunity.
13 It's good for them, it's good for
14 the public, it's bad for the
15 exploiters. We should be doing it
16 for that reason alone. So any
17 effort to stop them being
18 discriminated against based upon
19 having been victimized and
20 exploited I think is really a great
21 idea.

22 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

23 Quetcy Lozada.

24 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

1 Thank you and thank you for being
2 with us this afternoon. I guess
3 I'm kind of taken aback that johns
4 that the -- I guess the johns, I
5 don't know what else to call them,
6 right, that there's not been any
7 arrested or any prosecuted in a
8 really long time. Because in my
9 community, you see prostitution and
10 sex work and human trafficking
11 happening all the time.

12 And so, I'm just
13 really -- and there's always this
14 light on the person who's being
15 trafficked, right. But I rarely
16 hear about the person who is coming
17 to ask for services. And so, is
18 there a reason why? Are they being
19 diverted? Is there some type of a
20 diversion program that protects
21 them? Why? Why have we not seen
22 prosecution in a long time and
23 we've seen these young women who
24 sometimes are put in these really

1 tough situations? We see them, you
2 know, being questioned, picked up
3 all the time. I don't understand
4 why.

5 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

6 KRASNER: Well, thank you for the
7 question. Let me try to answer it
8 as best I can. Because the reality
9 is obviously the police department
10 makes arrests and then we work off
11 of their arrests to make
12 prosecutions. And I don't want to
13 guess at their decision-making.

14 I have found over time
15 that the police commissioner and
16 the police department make
17 difficult decisions after careful
18 deliberation and for good reasons.
19 But I will say this, looking back
20 on my career which is now at about
21 38 years, something like that,
22 looking back a couple of decades
23 when these cases were more common,
24 what I tended to see at that time

1 was often a woman police officer
2 who basically dressed up as if that
3 person was being trafficked and
4 they were on the street, and they
5 would hail cars and then they would
6 have a conversation about what
7 would the price be to do a
8 particular sexual act, that sort of
9 thing. And in that context, we
10 used to see more of those arrests
11 occurring. I don't know why, you
12 know.

13 I will say that we have
14 to remember that we have watched a
15 historic drop in shootings and
16 homicides. That is not one year
17 old. It is four years old, year
18 over year over year. And we have
19 seen what is frankly a pretty
20 magnificent achievement on the part
21 of the Philadelphia police in terms
22 of their reorganizing their
23 investigations of shootings and
24 improvements in terms of how they

1 do homicides.

2 I think it is clear that
3 the Philadelphia Police Department
4 with our law enforcement partners,
5 including the DA's Office has
6 placed a very high emphasis on
7 getting gun violence under control.
8 There have been moments during the
9 pandemic when I remember a prior
10 police commissioner saying that she
11 was not going to make any drug
12 arrests because of the danger at a
13 time when there was no vaccination
14 for COVID, the danger of having
15 half the police force come down
16 with COVID. Not my decision, her
17 decision. I'm not here to second-
18 guess all of that.

19 But there are certainly
20 times, especially when you are
21 understaffed and there is
22 understaffing all over the country
23 in policing, there are times when
24 they make choices and they decide

1 what it is that they're going to
2 prioritize. Having said that, I
3 cannot speak for them. I cannot
4 say whether that is the reason.

5 I can tell you I like
6 the Commissioner very much. I
7 think that the Commissioner makes a
8 lot of really smart decisions based
9 on a long, successful, strategic,
10 thoughtful career. So I do not
11 want anybody to claim that I'm
12 pointing fingers, throwing anybody
13 under the bus. I'm not. I'm just
14 trying to answer your question as
15 best I can, and I'm not the best
16 person situated to answer it.

17 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:
18 Could it be because of how we've
19 started to treat sex work in the
20 district, right? So if we're not
21 arresting the sex worker and
22 there's not a person to be able to
23 hold that individual accountable,
24 right. So could it be that -- I'm

1 asking the question, right. Again,
2 I'm not trying to point fingers.

3 I'm saying if we're not
4 arresting the person who's actually
5 providing the service, then there's
6 no way for you to be able to bring
7 charges against the person who was
8 requesting the service. And could
9 that be a part of why? And so,
10 while we're trying -- and I'm
11 thinking that it could be because
12 we're protecting this individual
13 who's doing the work, that we're
14 allowing this other individual to
15 get away with requesting the work
16 or the service?

17 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

18 KRASNER: I believe the short
19 answer is no, because the cases
20 that I saw in prior decades were
21 cases where a police officer posed
22 as the person who was offering sex
23 for money, put it that way, I
24 guess, or being trafficked. I

1 don't ever remember seeing a case
2 in Philadelphia against a john, if
3 I may use that term, where you had
4 someone who had been arrested for
5 sex work testifying against them.
6 I didn't see that.

7 I've been clear from the
8 beginning that while I did not
9 believe in the arrest and
10 prosecution of people who were
11 being trafficked, I was fine with
12 the arrest and prosecution in the
13 appropriate way that is just in the
14 individual case for johns, and I
15 consider the activity of
16 traffickers to be despicable and
17 worthy of appropriately serious
18 consequences as well.

19 So it has never been the
20 policy of the Philadelphia DA's
21 Office that we will refuse to
22 prosecute johns. Now, I will also
23 say that I'm sure you're aware that
24 in the last several years there

1 became a police diversionary
2 program, which operates before
3 arrest so there is no arrest. That
4 is a program that has been positive
5 and successful in various other
6 cities, places like Seattle.

7 I have no idea, because
8 we don't see those cases, whether
9 some of the people who are going
10 into the police diversionary
11 program are johns. I don't know.
12 But I'm sure there may be
13 information from other sources that
14 could answer some of those
15 questions.

16 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:
17 Okay. I'm just curious about it.
18 I'm actually concerned about it,
19 right. Because if we're not
20 responding on the street, if we're
21 not responding to these johns the
22 street, then we push them into the
23 shadows so that then they are
24 preying on younger children online,

1 right. And sometimes we don't
2 know -- we're not seeing them
3 because we've moved them off of the
4 street and into spaces that we can
5 less control. And so, I'm very
6 curious.

7 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

8 KRASNER: Councilmember, I think
9 you raise a very important issue,
10 which is that our legitimate
11 marketplace has changed radically
12 in terms of how business is done.
13 And certainly, the same is true
14 when it comes to illegal activity,
15 that there's an awful lot of stuff
16 done on the internet now that was
17 never done before. So it is very
18 possible that the opportunity for
19 police that used to exist for
20 street activity is different or is
21 reduced or that this issue has to
22 be addressed in a different way in
23 light of the internet and its
24 prevalence in economies.

1 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

2 And my last question, are you all
3 or does your office have the
4 capacity to be able to, just like
5 we have these frequent flyers,
6 right, there has to be johns that
7 are frequent flyers. And does your
8 office have the capacity to be able
9 to keep that kind of a record where
10 you're starting an investigation,
11 that you can maybe track whether
12 they've moved off of that very
13 visible on-the-street type of
14 solicitation to an online platform?

15 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

16 KRASNER: We certainly would be
17 willing to help with that. We do
18 have a couple of criminologists on
19 staff. We have a data team. But I
20 also know that I am surrounded by
21 other witnesses who will testify
22 for you today who have deep
23 expertise and have dedicated, in
24 some instances, their lives to this

1 kind of work.

2 They may be able to
3 answer those questions immediately,
4 but we are more than willing to
5 study this, look into it, and work
6 with you on that.

7 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

8 Thank you, Councilmember Lozada.

9 Councilmember Landau.

10 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

11 Thank you. Just two quick
12 questions: One, can you tell us a
13 little bit more about any
14 collaboration you have statewide or
15 federally? I know it's a little
16 harder in this administration, but
17 in the previous administration we
18 had a great U.S. Attorney who was
19 focused on this issue.

20 And then the second
21 thing is, how will the launch of
22 our new forensics lab help you in
23 the work that you're doing?

24 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

1 KRASNER: Great question. Let me
2 start, if I may, with the forensics
3 lab and then I'm going to make sure
4 I check with my subject matter
5 expert here too. So what we have
6 found, there's kind of a mini
7 forensics lab that is very modern
8 operating now in Philadelphia.
9 It's part of the DA Office's Gun
10 Violence Task Force, and that is a
11 mini forensics lab that does not
12 have anything near the bandwidth
13 needed for the entire city or for a
14 whole variety of crimes. It's
15 dedicated essentially to firearm-
16 related crimes and that sort of
17 thing.

18 But what we have found
19 with that unit is that the
20 combination of machines that will
21 open up cell phones when cell
22 phones are legally confiscated and
23 open with a warrant, plus license
24 plate readers which are getting,

1 you know, literally millions of
2 hits from license plates all over
3 the city and registering where that
4 license plate was on, what date at
5 what time, that sort of thing, plus
6 advanced DNA, plus the use of
7 social media analysts, and this
8 might get us right to one of the
9 issues that was raised by
10 Councilmember Lozada, if we have
11 social media analysts who are going
12 after this vigorously, not just
13 going after shooting groups and
14 their activity, we can make a real
15 advance.

16 The short answer is that
17 we've seen enormous progress, and
18 this is a hub now where the FBI
19 brings its cases, Alcohol, Tobacco,
20 Firearms brings their cases, DEA
21 brings cases, you know, it's become
22 such a useful tool to solving cases
23 that used to be unsolvable, to
24 making a case so strong that it

1 will be a guilty plea rather than a
2 close trial, that sort of thing.

3 I think what we see in
4 that experiment is how incredibly
5 compelling it could be to have a
6 full-on modern forensics lab that
7 can handle the full bandwidth of
8 all that needs to be done in the
9 city. Absolutely would make a huge
10 difference here to have a whole
11 team of social media analysts to be
12 able to take the cell phone of a
13 john, let's say, or the cell phone
14 of a cooperating person who's a
15 survivor of trafficking and be able
16 to look at the text and the context
17 and who these people are.

18 We prove homicide cases
19 these days, often without a single
20 witness, based upon a combination
21 of video and communications that
22 are going on, geolocation, things
23 of that sort, the story is there,
24 the investigation is there. And

1 completing and opening a well-
2 staffed, properly-trained forensics
3 lab in Philly could make a
4 tremendous difference in this area
5 as well as almost every other.

6 Now, your other question
7 went to -- I'm sorry. I forgot.

8 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
9 That's okay. A collaboration with
10 state and federal partners.

11 DISTRICT ATTORNEY
12 KRASNER: Oh, sure. If I may, let
13 me just see what the current state
14 of that is. I know it's generally
15 very collaborative, but let me see
16 if I can give you more precision.

17 Well, the good news is
18 we have a subject matter expert
19 here who will explain this better
20 than I can because I'll mix up the
21 names, but here we go.

22 MS. WADAS: Yes. So I
23 was saying that currently we do
24 attend a partnership that's

1 actually led by New Day, which I
2 know that they are here to speak on
3 it, but New Day does lead an Anti-
4 Human Trafficking Task Force, and
5 that is something that currently
6 the District Attorney's Office does
7 participate in.

8 And so, by going to
9 those Anti-Trafficking Task Force
10 meetings, we are meeting with other
11 law enforcement agencies throughout
12 the city, and we do have
13 collaborative relationships through
14 that partnership with the various
15 entities.

16 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
17 Thank you, Councilmember Landau.

18 Just to follow up on
19 that, what I'm hearing is you don't
20 get to prosecute the johns because
21 they're not coming in front of you,
22 so that's something for us to
23 explore. This task force, does
24 that give you an update on how many

1 cases are current and what the
2 disposition is and some data around
3 to say, yes, we're all working
4 collaboratively. So between this
5 year and this year when we compare,
6 there have been more cases or is
7 that not the case?

8 MS. WADAS: That's
9 absolutely the case. And so,
10 usually we will do partner updates.
11 And so, each agency will talk
12 about -- SVU, for example, will
13 mention how many cases have been
14 investigated and how many cases
15 have been referred, that they're
16 seeing usually the numbers, as the
17 DA mentioned, are low.

18 For example, the last
19 partner meeting that I attended SVU
20 had reported only one referral and
21 that was in 2024, so that is one of
22 what we know is a much larger
23 number of trafficking cases, but
24 one actually being referred. And

1 so, New Day does keep excellent
2 minutes from those meetings in
3 which they sort of record and we
4 can look back on each agency's
5 updates as it pertains to what
6 we're seeing as far as
7 investigations and prosecutions.

8 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: So
9 just before I let this panel go,
10 what would be your recommendation
11 in order for us to be able to,
12 first of all, you know, get these
13 survivors out of, you know, give
14 them resources, number one,
15 identify them, and two is to
16 prosecute the traffickers and the
17 johns.

18 Given where you are now
19 participating in this task force,
20 what would be a recommendation for
21 us to proceed in order for those
22 numbers to go up so that we can
23 send the message Philadelphia is
24 not good for that business?

1 MS. WADAS: Well, one
2 thing that we already do with our
3 partners is talk about education,
4 and one thing that often comes from
5 those coalition meetings is we
6 learn about new updates in training
7 opportunities. And I think the
8 biggest thing in this realm that is
9 helpful is to spreading the word,
10 to educating not only each other,
11 but putting word out among all of
12 the agencies for opportunities to
13 expand our knowledge around this
14 subject. Because I think sometimes
15 not knowing is often why certain
16 things aren't being referred.

17 Often times we'll get
18 referrals. For example, if we do
19 get a referral for a trafficking
20 case and there is that component of
21 promoting prostitution, which is
22 the charge that usually goes hand-
23 in-hand with prosecuting a john,
24 for lack of better words, if we're

1 seeing that come through charging
2 and certain charges are missing,
3 it's always a charge that can be
4 added, but often times we're only
5 seeing things that are missing
6 because of a lack of understanding.

7 Alternatively, we're
8 seeing cases that will come in
9 simply as charged as rape, for
10 example, but there's a lack of
11 understanding or misunderstanding
12 about the fact that this is
13 actually trafficking as well. And
14 so, just better training and better
15 understanding and spreading the
16 word about what trafficking is, is
17 the biggest help in this realm.

18 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: So
19 for every case that comes for
20 prostitution, there should be a
21 joining case for a john. If the
22 police are apprehending people who
23 are providing the service, they're
24 providing it to someone to

1 Councilmember Lozada's point.

2 Where is the concomitant arrest of
3 the john who was using the
4 services?

5 Maybe we can get to the
6 trafficker right away, right. We
7 have to build a case and find them.
8 But these two players, if we have
9 one, we should have the other.

10 MS. WADAS: Not
11 necessarily. Because sometimes
12 just as there are officers who
13 would dress up as individuals who
14 were offering services, sometimes
15 they did have Vice representatives
16 who would dress up for the sake of
17 sort of luring and enticing. And
18 so, it could be an officer dressed
19 up and trying to obtain those
20 services and there wouldn't
21 necessarily be a john, for lack of
22 better words. On the other end of
23 it, it would be an officer.

24 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: So

1 we're just not being able to find
2 the john. I mean, clearly, this is
3 a multi-billion dollar business.
4 And the fact that you can have --
5 when you're involved in the drug
6 business, you know, somebody buys a
7 hit and it's over. One person can
8 be trafficked over and over and
9 over again. This is hugely
10 lucrative.

11 So I'm just at a loss
12 that the City of Philadelphia --
13 and I'm not blaming you. I just
14 have you in front of me so you can
15 hear me. So how is it that the
16 City of Philadelphia tells me we
17 don't have prosecutions for people
18 participating in it that is causing
19 such harm and we haven't found the
20 tentacles to get to the
21 traffickers?

22 Let me just tell you not
23 because, you know, I know there's
24 multiple people actors to make this

1 happen. This is unacceptable. It
2 is unacceptable that we are not
3 making this a priority. And I'll
4 have the conversation with our
5 Police Commissioner and all of
6 them, because we have a whole
7 campaign coming up for 2026. And
8 thank you, Mr. DA, for being there.

9 Because this is what
10 we're trying to get at: That this
11 is not an insignificant issue. The
12 fact that there were two lawsuits
13 settled in the recent past with
14 these motels for millions of
15 dollars tells you that that trade
16 is flourishing in order for them to
17 actually be involved in it. So we
18 need to make this a priority.

19 I would love to have
20 your office at least sound the
21 alarm that this is a priority and
22 require your partners, which would
23 be the police and other agencies,
24 to really start paying attention so

1 that when we see somebody coming to
2 WOAR for assault, to make sure that
3 assault is not a one-time assault,
4 that somebody just, you know, raped
5 somebody, it could be a pattern.

6 We need to have those
7 kinds of policies in place that
8 alert anybody interacting with
9 anybody who's a victim of sexual
10 violence has a series of cascade of
11 things that happen that would then
12 link the rest of why they're there.
13 You could prove that they were just
14 a one-time or we could prove a
15 whole thing. But we have to make
16 this a priority or else it's not
17 going to happen. And it can't be
18 just the police's priority. It has
19 to be the DA's priority. It has to
20 be all our social services'
21 priority. It has to be our
22 hospitals. It has to be everybody.
23 You're not alone.

24 But I'm just saying we

1 all need to take the piece that we
2 can be responsible for and really
3 start highlighting it. And of
4 course, the education is very
5 important, but it's already
6 happening. Billions of dollars
7 worth of it is happening. So did
8 you want to say something, Mr. DA?

9 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

10 KRASNER: First of all, I
11 appreciate all those comments and
12 agree with them. But it just
13 occurred to me that in a prior life
14 before I was DA, 2016, 2017, I was
15 representing a person who had
16 information on trafficking. He was
17 not a trafficker, but he had
18 information on trafficking that was
19 occurring in Chester County. It
20 was actually occurring somewhere in
21 the West Chester area.

22 It was a house that was
23 occupied by immigrants who were
24 being trafficked. And the person I

1 was representing provided
2 information in federal court to the
3 U.S. Attorney's Office with federal
4 agents there on that situation,
5 which seemed to me to be important
6 and something that would result in
7 some consequences. It was not.

8 It was a situation where
9 the information was all provided.
10 And for reasons, you know, I'm not
11 going to misrepresent that I know
12 all the reasons, but I was
13 disappointed frankly to see that
14 the follow-up was negligible, sort
15 of in the nature of they were not
16 that interested or maybe they
17 looked and it didn't seem like it
18 was that big a deal or something to
19 that effect.

20 Again, I don't want to
21 mischaracterize exactly what their
22 thinking was, but I can tell you
23 there was no action. As best I can
24 tell, the information was provided

1 in the usual way that information
2 is provided in federal court in
3 expectation of a serious follow-up
4 and a possible prosecution and no
5 prosecution came from it.

6 I know this of course
7 because the reason you give
8 information to the feds is for some
9 benefit. My client was looking for
10 some benefit. He got no benefit
11 because nothing came of it. So I
12 share your concern about it. I
13 think it's important. But I will
14 also share this with you, if we
15 want to get traffickers, we should
16 get traffickers. We should go get
17 traffickers. If you want to stop
18 murders, go get murderers. If you
19 want to stop shooters, go get
20 shooters.

21 And I think what we
22 should do here is to vigorously go
23 after trafficking, use all the
24 tools at our disposal. And what we

1 have seen in this city and in other
2 cities is that when people focus on
3 the crime they're trying to stop,
4 there's success. When the focus is
5 on sort of peripheral stuff or
6 you're focusing the second and
7 third priorities rather than going
8 all in on the first priority, the
9 number one priority here should be
10 to go after the traffickers and to
11 give them just an appropriate and
12 frankly pretty serious consequences
13 because this is a terrible crime.

14 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
15 Couldn't agree more. And as you
16 know, we have a federal environment
17 where there's a human trafficking
18 case being talked about in the
19 public right now. So I'm not
20 surprised that people are not
21 willing to go down that road for
22 many different reasons.

23 However, this is why
24 we're doing this. This is why

1 we're having a hearing. This is
2 why we're doing a campaign. We
3 want the public to rise up and
4 say -- because the public are also
5 the voters who vote these people
6 in. I was not going to use the
7 word I was thinking of.

8 However, we need an
9 awareness, which is why I need
10 partners from law enforcement to be
11 partners in saying, yes, this is a
12 crime and we are happy to prosecute
13 it. We are going to be an open
14 door for you to come and your
15 person who had tried to testify on
16 this, but we have to change the
17 culture, and that's what this is
18 about. We are doing this law.
19 We're going to talk about there's
20 some other things coming down the
21 pike and the campaign next year.
22 So thank you for your testimony.
23 Thank you.

24 Just before

1 Mr. Listenbee goes, because of your
2 interest in young people, one of
3 the intersections we are looking at
4 is foster care and trafficking.

5 Even though this hearing is
6 specifically about a workplace
7 accommodation, I want to make sure
8 we are looking at that intersection
9 and we are vigorous in making sure
10 we can guarantee the safety of
11 young people, particularly who are
12 in the child welfare system. I
13 just wanted a quick word from you
14 because I have you here.

15 MR. LISTENBEE: Thank
16 you. I'm not very familiar with
17 the child welfare system in terms
18 of their involvement with
19 trafficking. What I do know is
20 that at the federal level when I
21 worked there, not only was there a
22 strong policy interest in
23 addressing trafficking issues, but
24 there were constant meetings at the

1 White House and constant meetings
2 at the Department of Human Services
3 at the national level, constant
4 meetings at the Department of
5 Justice that were focused on
6 developing the tools to be
7 implemented to stop trafficking.

8 There was a clear focus
9 on victims, that they should not be
10 prosecuted. We wrote that into
11 policies at that level and we
12 distributed those policies across
13 the nation and provided funding to
14 support those initiatives at that
15 time. Clearly, if we're going to
16 do it here at the local level, we
17 need to do something similar, a
18 strong campaign, strong
19 announcements about it.

20 A lot of young people
21 don't know what trafficking is.
22 They don't really often times know
23 what rape is for a lot of young
24 people. We need to educate them

1 and provide a clear mechanism for
2 enforcing the new policies that are
3 going to be implemented so that
4 young people can figure out through
5 social media how to reach out and
6 seek help if they're being
7 trafficked, to seek help if their
8 friends are being trafficked, seek
9 help if they know where johns are,
10 seek help if they know where the
11 traffickers are. So that kind of
12 communication is essential for the
13 future.

14 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

15 Well, thank you. I look forward to
16 working with all of you. Thank you
17 all for your testimony.

18 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

19 KRASNER: Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

21 Thank you. Thank you for your
22 testimony.

23 Mr. Sham, will you call
24 the next panel.

1 THE CLERK: We have
2 three witnesses for this panel.
3 One will be testifying virtually.
4 First, we have Megan Lundstrom,
5 Polaris CEO and human trafficking
6 survivor.

7 MS. LUNDSTROM: Good
8 afternoon. Can everyone hear me
9 okay?

10 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
11 Yes.

12 MS. LUNDSTROM:
13 Wonderful. My name is Megan
14 Lundstrom and I am the CEO of
15 Polaris based in Washington, D.C.
16 We're a national anti-trafficking
17 organization that has served
18 hundreds of thousands of victims
19 and survivors across the country
20 over the last 23 years.

21 Over the last decade of
22 my career, I have focused on
23 building evidence-based economic
24 empowerment programs for survivors

1 of human trafficking. My passion
2 on this topic came initially from
3 my own experience as a survivor of
4 human trafficking myself and the
5 challenges I encountered as I tried
6 to regain economic stability.

7 I'm here in support of
8 Bill 250990. This ordinance is a
9 meaningful step towards ensuring
10 that survivors seeking gainful
11 employment in Philadelphia are not
12 punished in the workplace for the
13 consequences of their own
14 exploitation. In national
15 workforce research I conducted
16 several years ago, I found that
17 survivors frequently experience
18 losing jobs, facing retaliation or
19 being pushed out of work because
20 employers misinterpreted the
21 impacts of trauma, economic
22 instability or safety issues.

23 One of the most common
24 barriers to keeping a job was

1 interpersonal issues with
2 supervisors, not because of
3 performance but because supervisors
4 lacked trauma-informed
5 understanding and responded with
6 suspicion or punitive action when
7 what survivors actually needed was
8 flexibility or support.

9 These challenges are
10 backed by the National Survivor
11 Study, the NSS, Polaris' 2023
12 survey of survivors across the
13 United States, which is the largest
14 study conducted at this time on the
15 long-term outcomes for survivors of
16 human trafficking. The NSS
17 findings are powerful.

18 We found that 43% of
19 survivors after exploitation are
20 living on less than \$25,000 per
21 year while supporting families of
22 two to three individuals, many of
23 those children. And long after
24 leaving their trafficking

1 situation, this continues to
2 persist. Many survivors work
3 multiple jobs, but still can't meet
4 basic needs, much less begin to
5 build savings.

6 In fact, the study found
7 that even seven years after
8 exiting, 30% of survivors remain
9 below \$25,000 a year, trapped in
10 poverty despite full participation
11 in the workforce. Another finding
12 from the NSS was the unique
13 structural disadvantage survivors
14 face.

15 62% of survivors
16 surveyed had been arrested, cited
17 or detained. And 90% of those with
18 criminal records said their arrests
19 were directly tied to their
20 exploitation. A criminal record
21 that is caused by coercion then
22 becomes a barrier to employment,
23 housing, education and even custody
24 of children. For those survivors,

1 discrimination isn't hypothetical.

2 It is a daily reality.

3 We know from survivor-
4 led research that the same economic
5 barriers that push people into
6 vulnerability, poverty,
7 discrimination, lack of opportunity
8 are the ones that persist after
9 trafficking and continue to limit
10 survivor stability. Systemic
11 inequities in employment
12 disproportionately expose certain
13 communities to trafficking in the
14 first place, especially for
15 children growing up in homes below
16 the poverty level. This
17 underscores the stakes of workplace
18 protections.

19 Economic stability is
20 nice to have. It's central to both
21 preventing exploitation in the
22 first place and supporting long-
23 term safety afterwards. This bill
24 provides essential protections for

1 those harms.

2 I want to highlight two
3 implementation risks, not as
4 reasons to hesitate by any means,
5 but as reasons to continue to
6 strengthen the city's long-term
7 strategy. First, survivor
8 protections cannot depend on a
9 formal certification as a
10 trafficking victim. Very few,
11 likely less than 10% of survivors,
12 ever receive formal designation
13 through law enforcement or a
14 government process. The vast
15 majority never report, often due to
16 fear, safety concerns or the simple
17 fact that many don't even recognize
18 their own victimization until years
19 later.

20 While the text of this
21 bill does not require
22 certification, and I support that
23 approach, Philadelphia should issue
24 clear employer guidance to ensure

1 the protection applies broadly.
2 Second, survivors should not have
3 to disclose their trafficking
4 history to be treated fairly. The
5 reality is that disclosure is very
6 risky. It can expose survivors to
7 retaliation, stigma or harassment
8 in the workplace.

9 For many, it can
10 jeopardize their safety. Any
11 rollout of this ordinance should
12 ensure survivors can request
13 accommodations or protections
14 without being forced to reveal the
15 details of deeply personal trauma.
16 Finally, I want to highlight an
17 important intersection.

18 Many survivors of human
19 trafficking qualify for
20 accommodations under the Americans
21 with Disabilities Act, but they
22 often do not know their rights or
23 fear retaliation for asserting
24 them. This is an area where the

1 city can eventually expand guidance
2 and ensure employers understand how
3 trauma, disability and
4 discrimination intersect, not just
5 for this population, but other
6 populations disproportionately
7 impacted by systemic exclusion.

8 Bill 250990 is a
9 foundational step, one that aligns
10 survivor protections with the
11 values and civil rights framework
12 of the City of Philadelphia. It
13 helps ensure that when survivors
14 step into the workforce, they are
15 met with fairness, not bias, with
16 opportunity, not punishment.

17 This ordinance also
18 opens the door for future
19 legislation, housing protections,
20 criminal record relief pathways,
21 accommodation guidance and
22 survivor-centered anti-
23 discrimination enforcement.
24 Philadelphia has the opportunity to

1 continue leading nationally in
2 building a modern, comprehensive
3 framework that supports survivors,
4 not only in escaping exploitation,
5 but in rebuilding our lives.

6 So in closing, I urge
7 the Council to pass this ordinance.
8 Survivors deserve a fair chance at
9 stability, dignity and economic
10 security, and this bill brings that
11 future closer. Thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
13 Thank you so -- can you hear me?
14 Can you hear me? Maybe she
15 can't --

16 MS. LUNDSTROM: Yes, I
17 can.

18 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
19 Well, thank you so much for your
20 testimony because you brought up
21 some very important critical
22 points. One of the questions I had
23 was, where we meet survivors, if
24 there was education, even before

1 they're at the employer stage, we
2 can start the process of how they
3 can be mainstreamed back to life,
4 right, where they can be who they
5 are without having to constantly
6 remember this burden that they
7 carry.

8 And you can submit this
9 later, but if you have some
10 thoughts about what that could look
11 like, starting with the time when
12 there might be in the victim crisis
13 center all the way across until we
14 get to the employer. That pathway
15 is something I think we need for
16 more people to talk about,
17 understand, so that you don't have
18 to tell the story over and over
19 again and retraumatize yourself,
20 particularly in the workspace. So
21 we can get some thoughts from you
22 on that in writing or we can talk
23 later, but if you just want to
24 summarize quickly what that could

1 look like.

2 MS. LUNDSTROM:

3 Absolutely. Yeah, I think that is
4 very important, Councilwoman. And
5 that is something that Polaris has
6 been focused on for the last 18
7 years initially through the
8 operation of the National Human
9 Trafficking Hotline. But as we
10 move into 2026 under a new
11 strategic plan, we're going to be
12 focused ongoing on strengthening
13 the coordination and referral
14 pathways for survivors of human
15 trafficking.

16 So to your point, I do
17 think that is very important, and
18 building out those plans of where
19 in our communities are survivors of
20 trafficking and whether or not they
21 identify as such, how can we be
22 providing information in those
23 spaces so that they know what their
24 rights are and what resources are

1 available to them.

2 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

3 Thank you so much.

4 Do any of my colleagues
5 have any questions?

6 Yes. Councilmember
7 O'Rourke.

8 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE: I
9 actually don't have any questions,
10 Madam Chair, but thank you for
11 giving me the mic. I just wanted
12 to say thank you for being willing
13 and vulnerable to share your
14 testimony and coming before us
15 today. All of what you share is
16 essential in helping us be better
17 legislators and lawmakers to make
18 people safe, and the City of
19 Philadelphia to be the kind of
20 place that can host an event like
21 next year and all people can be
22 safe in doing so. Thank you again
23 for your story.

24 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

1 Thank you so much. If there are no
2 more questions, we will let her get
3 off her computer. Thank you so
4 much, Megan. I appreciate it and
5 we'll be in touch.

6 Mr. Sham, will you call
7 the rest of the witnesses for this
8 panel.

9 THE CLERK: Jacqueline
10 George, Policy Advocate and
11 survivor leader, and Karissa Wenk,
12 Policy Advocate and survivor
13 leader.

14 (Witnesses approached
15 witness table.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
17 Thank you so much for being here.
18 Please state your name and begin
19 your testimony.

20 And I just want to give
21 a tiny caveat. Because we want to
22 actually vote on this bill at the
23 end of all the testimony, if you
24 could, I don't want to take away

1 from your testimony, right, these
2 are important, thoughtful testimony
3 and very traumatizing for you to
4 have to redo this, so if there's a
5 way to streamline it a little bit,
6 I just request -- but if you feel
7 that we need to hear it, but I'm
8 just letting you know that for this
9 bill to proceed, we need to take a
10 vote at the end of all of this. So
11 please proceed. Thank you.

12 MS. GEORGE: Thank you.
13 All right. My name is Jacqueline
14 George and I'm a proud homeowner in
15 the 7th Council District. I want
16 to begin by thanking Councilwoman
17 Ahmad's team for inviting me to
18 testify today and for introducing
19 Bill No. 250990. Thank you also to
20 the Public Health and Human
21 Services Committee for convening
22 this hearing today.

23 I am currently the
24 Co-chair of Pennsylvania's Against

1 Human Trafficking Working Group,
2 advocacy working group, and I
3 previously served as an
4 intelligence analyst with PPD,
5 where I was assigned East Division
6 of Kensington, and I was also
7 deputized to the FBI Human
8 Trafficking and Child Exploitation
9 Task Force doing exactly what
10 Krasner just was talking about.

11 Some of you may know me
12 also from my current role and past
13 roles in city government and my
14 current nonprofit role working
15 closely with the Office of Public
16 Safety. I'm here today however in
17 my capacity as a citizen and
18 advocate and survivor leader and
19 not speaking on behalf of my
20 previous roles.

21 Regardless, I do want to
22 say thank you for the previous
23 questions on that panel. Those
24 were a lot of questions that I

1 wanted to ask myself. I do want to
2 say too there is a connection
3 between trafficking and shooting
4 violence in this city and
5 absolutely drug trafficking as
6 well. So to say that those two are
7 not related is to me a little bit
8 questionable.

9 I'm usually the data
10 nerd who hides behind a computer,
11 and I do feel compelled now, more
12 than ever, to speak about the
13 importance of legislation like this
14 one today, which truly reflects the
15 dignity, protection and level of
16 respect that our government should
17 be showing survivors.

18 I myself am a survivor
19 of sexual violence, and that is
20 something that I would have never
21 said publicly if not for
22 legislation like this and, of
23 course, for my survivor community.
24 I live with various trauma-related

1 ailments. I have complex PTSD,
2 immune dysregulation, chronic pain,
3 you name it. Trauma makes me break
4 out in pretty much anything.

5 I had shingles on my
6 face when I was 18, and I started
7 FMLA with the city when I was 25.
8 I have regular flares that result
9 in hospital stays and I'm
10 unfortunately too familiar with the
11 stigma of being problematic at work
12 because I have to take time off to
13 really take care of myself, despite
14 looking relatively healthy.

15 This legislation
16 prevents people like myself from
17 having to continually explain
18 ourselves and the stories that we
19 endured to be understood. I also
20 want to thank my survivor sisters
21 for giving me the courage to be up
22 here. We have a group called The
23 Philly Feminist. Their names are
24 Jerianna and Jaycee and I also want

1 to thank Karissa, who's here with
2 me to my right, just for being
3 survivor leaders and fantastic
4 people who've shown me this way.

5 There's another person I
6 would like to thank as well who's
7 not here, who really should be
8 speaking because she's the one
9 who's taught me everything and I
10 know she's taught Karissa a lot.
11 We call her mom because she's such
12 a warrior and advocate for us, but
13 that's Shea Rhodes with the
14 Villanova Institute to Address
15 Commercial Sexual Exploitation, and
16 just wanted to thank her for being
17 such a strong mentor and really
18 just a great friend.

19 So overall, I do urge
20 you to pass this bill and thank you
21 for your time, your attention and
22 your commitment to justice and for
23 survivors.

24 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

1 Thank you so much. And Shea was
2 invited to testify and she actually
3 has reviewed this bill with us, so
4 she's very much involved in the
5 process. But thank you for naming
6 everybody because it matters for
7 people to hear real people are
8 involved in this.

9 MS. GEORGE: Thank you.

10 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Go
11 ahead. Please state your name and
12 begin your testimony.

13 MS. WENK: Hi. Good
14 afternoon, Chair and Committee
15 members. My name is Karissa Wenk.
16 Thank you for the opportunity to
17 testify today. I am a child sex
18 trafficking survivor. I was
19 trafficked as a juvenile here in
20 Philadelphia. I'm also a recent
21 Wharton grad. I work at Penn
22 Medicine and I serve on both the
23 Salvation Army Survival Council and
24 the City's Anti-Trafficking

1 Coalition Steering Committee.

2 I share that because
3 it's important to understand that
4 survivors are not a monolith.

5 We're your neighbors, your
6 colleagues, your classmates and
7 your constituents. We span every
8 background, every age and every
9 part of the city. Right now I'm
10 actively searching for work in
11 victim advocacy roles where lived
12 experience is not only relevant,
13 but incredibly valuable.

14 But here's the reality:
15 By testifying publicly today, I'm
16 naming myself as a survivor in a
17 way that any employer can find.
18 And with this bill that -- and
19 without this bill, that visibility,
20 this act of civic participation,
21 could be used against me in the
22 hiring process. That's backwards
23 because we often tell survivors to
24 speak out, to lead, to sit at

1 policy tables.

2 The human services field
3 often says it values lived
4 experience. But in practice,
5 survivors can be viewed as a
6 liability. Not because of anything
7 we've done, but because of
8 assumptions about our trauma. That
9 contradiction leaves many survivors
10 choosing between using their voice
11 and safeguarding their livelihood.

12 And these issues go far
13 beyond stigma. Survivors face real
14 structural barriers in the hiring
15 process. Some have large gaps in
16 their employment history that
17 reflect periods of exploitation,
18 not unreliability. Some have
19 unstable housing or ongoing safety
20 concerns that employers
21 misinterpret. Some are navigating
22 court dates, therapy or trauma
23 recovery. All of these can be
24 misunderstood as problems. When in

1 reality, they are signs of someone
2 fighting to rebuild their life.

3 None of these
4 circumstances make someone a bad
5 employer unhireable. In fact,
6 survivors are often among the most
7 reliable, resilient, adaptable and
8 motivated workers you will find.

9 The challenge isn't about our
10 capability. It's about the
11 assumptions that people make about
12 us.

13 This is also a public
14 health issue. Stable employment is
15 one of the strongest protective
16 factors for survivors. It
17 determines whether someone can
18 maintain safe housing, access
19 medical and mental health care,
20 stay connected to treatment and
21 avoid the economic vulnerabilities
22 that traffickers often exploit.

23 If you want to prevent
24 re-exploitation, you have to

1 protect survivors economic
2 stability. And from a workforce
3 perspective, this matters as well.
4 Philadelphia needs more advocates,
5 more peer specialists, more trauma-
6 informed staff, people who truly
7 understand exploitation.

8 Survivors offer that
9 depth of understanding. But when
10 we lack basic employment
11 protections, many are discouraged
12 from pursuing the very roles their
13 lived experience makes them so
14 uniquely qualified for. That is
15 why recognizing human trafficking
16 victim status as a protected class
17 is so important.

18 This bill does not
19 require disclosure, it does not
20 create special accommodations. It
21 simply ensures that if an employer
22 does learn someone is a survivor,
23 whether through disclosure, through
24 media coverage or through public

1 advocacy like this, they cannot use
2 that information to deny them a job
3 or promotion or fair treatment.

4 Survivor leadership
5 strengthens the city. Survivors
6 deserve to be part of civic life,
7 to use our voices to serve on
8 councils, to help shape policy, and
9 to do so without sacrificing our
10 economic futures.

11 Committee members, you
12 have the ability today to remove a
13 significant barrier to long-term
14 safety and stability for survivors
15 across Philadelphia. Passing this
16 bill ensures that no survivor has
17 to choose between telling their
18 truth and earning a living. It
19 ensures that our resilience is
20 recognized, not stigmatized. And
21 it ensures that survivors can build
22 lives grounded in dignity,
23 independence and self-
24 determination. Thank you again for

1 giving me the opportunity to share
2 my experience and my support for
3 this legislation. I'm happy to
4 answer any questions.

5 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

6 Thank you. Both of you gave such
7 detailed testimony and you read it
8 at a nice pace, so thank you for
9 that. But there was really
10 important content here.

11 One of the things I'm
12 hearing from you, Karissa, is that
13 training of people becomes really
14 important, right. Whether or not
15 they encountered someone who's a
16 survivor or not just the awareness
17 what we talked with the panel
18 before, how do we elevate this.
19 That elevation comes with a
20 concrete issue of training,
21 requiring some training for
22 employers, right.

23 Meaning, we would make
24 sure we got training. Our team got

1 a training from the police
2 commissioner's office. What they
3 do -- it could be, yes, we need to
4 have some kind of unit that does
5 that for the City of Philadelphia.
6 What would you say about that being
7 something that is necessary?

8 MS. WENK: I mean, I
9 definitely agree that training is
10 incredibly important, both for
11 employers, for you guys as city
12 employees and for anyone kind of
13 working on this legislation. I
14 know New Day does a lot of really
15 fantastic training, and I've been
16 involved in kind of screening some
17 of that as a survivor, so I think
18 that that makes a lot of sense.

19 I think more so though,
20 kind of to what Krasner was saying
21 and some of the people in the
22 earlier panel, they spoke a lot to
23 the focus that their city has had
24 on gun violence over the years.

1 And I think that if any kind of
2 similar approach is taken towards
3 sexual violence, towards
4 trafficking or these other kind of
5 what's family violence and what's
6 the intimate partner violence, yes,
7 so that unit within the DA's
8 Office, a similar kind of training,
9 community-based, peer-based
10 approach similar to the CARES Unit,
11 etc, is deployed within the city.
12 I think we can really make a big
13 difference, and that would be kind
14 of what is needed at this point.

15 MS. GEORGE: Yeah, I
16 would agree as well. But I would
17 also say that there's a big
18 importance on the training to
19 highlight intersectionality with
20 human trafficking and other things
21 as well. So there's so many like
22 substance use, mental illness,
23 child abuse, all of those things,
24 like we were talking about foster

1 care runaways is again another huge
2 area as well.

3 And I would also say
4 that making sure that it's not just
5 the specialized units who get
6 trained but everybody gets trained.
7 Because in my past roles, I'm
8 trying not to speak to those roles
9 today, but to be here as a survivor
10 advocate, but still kind of
11 speaking to that, you know, you
12 would have SVU that would be
13 trained up and down. But the
14 people who are really encountering
15 the survivors and victims were
16 patrol and they didn't have the
17 training, but they were the ones
18 who wanted it. They were always
19 the first line, so things like
20 that.

21 And again, I'm just
22 thinking of things right now as
23 well. But again, to kind of pick
24 apart -- not to pick apart, but

1 poignant things from the last panel
2 that were starting to come out, I
3 know we were talking about, you
4 know, these stings and stuff too,
5 and trainings are going to be
6 needed for that, for Vice, but
7 really for trafficking.

8 All you need is a cell
9 phone nowadays. You can find a
10 john. You can find a pimp. You
11 don't even need a victim. You can
12 create a fake persona online. You
13 don't need to put people at risk.
14 So to say that we do not have the
15 staff or manpower in a day of
16 technology, it's a little bit
17 confusing. But I would say that
18 training both to highlight what
19 trafficking looks like in all of
20 its different phases, because it
21 looks so different depending on who
22 is being victimized.

23 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

24 Well, thank you for your vast

1 knowledge in this area. Hopefully
2 going forward, we will be talking
3 to all of you who are here so we're
4 informed as to what best to
5 legislate on or to work on with the
6 police, with the DA's Office. So
7 thank you again.

8 Anybody have a question?
9 Okay.

10 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:
11 Thank you both for sharing your
12 story. I think that for me, what
13 do we need to do as a committee, as
14 a legislative body to be able to
15 support those that are victims of
16 sex trafficking as it relates to
17 holding the pimp or the john more
18 accountable, right?

19 I think that as a
20 government or as public safety
21 officials, it's always about the
22 person who is offering the service,
23 right. It's always about the young
24 woman or the young man or whoever

1 it is that's providing the service.

2 And I never hear about holding the
3 other side accountable, right.

4 And in order for us to
5 be able to protect the victim,
6 right, we need to make sure that
7 that person no longer is harassing
8 you or coming to find you in your
9 places of work or in the
10 neighborhoods that you live in, the
11 places that you used to frequent,
12 right.

13 Because I could say, you
14 know, some people who have done
15 some of this sex work maybe have
16 decided, okay, I'm going to change
17 my life direction and I'm going to
18 try to do other things and I'm
19 going to go find a job and I'm
20 going to, you know, try to be
21 productive in a different way, and
22 you can't because that pimp or that
23 person who has used the services in
24 the past continue to show up.

1 So what can we do to
2 better protect you or people who
3 were in your situation or who find
4 themselves in this situation? How
5 do we better protect you?

6 MS. WENK: Yeah --

7 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:
8 And I say you, I mean, that's kind
9 of in general. That's not to you.

10 MS. WENK: I would like
11 to say that I think Philadelphia is
12 almost halfway there when it comes
13 to the way that we approach a lot
14 of these cases. The fact that we
15 aren't prosecuting human
16 trafficking survivors or going
17 after, you know, people providing
18 sexual services is definitely half
19 of the battle.

20 Because why would we
21 want -- as Larry Krasner shared,
22 why would we want to prosecute
23 people who are victims. It doesn't
24 make any sense. But the problem

1 is, if we only leave it halfway,
2 then there isn't that next step
3 where there really is the capacity.

4 Obviously, I am not a
5 subject matter expert on this. I'm
6 a survivor, but I also have spent a
7 lot of time in this space and done
8 a lot of research myself and worked
9 on various projects having to do
10 with, like, Johns Suppression
11 Initiative, etc. And there are
12 quite a few counties, I think
13 Krasner mentioned one as well,
14 Seattle, King County in Washington.
15 I believe that's the same county
16 that Seattle's in, as well as Cook
17 County actually runs the
18 National -- where Chicago runs the
19 National Johns Suppression
20 Initiative annually.

21 There are definitely
22 models out there that I think that
23 our city is making progress in the
24 right direction, but there needs to

1 be more investment on the law
2 enforcement side, on the
3 prosecutorial side to actually
4 making that step, because that is
5 what ultimately is going to keep
6 survivors safe, is to get their
7 johns, their pimps, their
8 exploiters off the street.

9 MS. GEORGE: For me, I
10 would say making sure that social
11 systems properly have oversight and
12 accountability. So our housing
13 system, our again substance use
14 treatment centers are ripe with
15 exploitation. I've seen a lot of
16 instances with people being pimped
17 out by their landlord, instances
18 where it looks like one thing, but
19 it's really another.

20 And I do want to
21 highlight too as well that there's
22 a lot of people who are trafficked
23 by their family. So when you're
24 saying we're going after these

1 traffickers and johns, I mean we're
2 talking about also the family
3 structure. So when we don't have a
4 really strong social support system
5 here in Philadelphia -- we have
6 DHS -- when these systems are
7 broken, it really makes
8 exploitation thrive.

9 And so, I do think that
10 when we move forward with these
11 systems that we're creating,
12 whether that -- again, we have a
13 really big initiative that's going
14 on in Kensington right now that I
15 like to talk about with us putting
16 people in through Wellness Court.
17 There also is an accountability
18 there.

19 We're creating a new
20 system, so maybe seeing how people
21 can be exploited in systems such as
22 that, because we have a lot of
23 people with mental illness,
24 substance use disorder and who are

1 dealing with homelessness, so all
2 of those vulnerabilities are the
3 same exact vulnerabilities that
4 make people ripe to be exploited
5 and trafficked. So I think really
6 when you want to try to tackle
7 this, really it's a public health
8 type of crime that is really ripe
9 with power-based for people to
10 exploit.

11 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: You
12 have a question?

13 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:
14 Can I just clarify?

15 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
16 Yes.

17 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:
18 Could you speak again to the
19 recommendation you were making
20 around Wellness Court, just for my
21 understanding?

22 MS. GEORGE: No. I'm
23 just saying when you create systems
24 that have vulnerable individuals

1 and whether that's through DHS,
2 foster care, a new diversionary
3 system, we're all accountable for
4 proper oversight of those systems.
5 And I think when you put people who
6 have all of these intersections of
7 vulnerabilities, that in itself is
8 what makes trafficking thrive.

9 And so, if we have a
10 system or a political nature that
11 is just not looking at the
12 oversight and the accountability of
13 this system, then that is how these
14 types of things happen.

15 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:

16 Okay. Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

18 Councilmember Landau.

19 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

20 Thank you. I just wanted to take a
21 second first to thank you so much
22 for sharing your stories, for your
23 courage, for coming here. What
24 you're doing today will help us

1 with employment protections for
2 people who have been trafficked,
3 but the information that you're
4 giving us is really helping to fuel
5 us to make sure that more people
6 aren't trafficked in the future.

7 I appreciate this,
8 particularly when you, who've been
9 doing the work for so long, can
10 identify vulnerable systems where
11 people are ripe to fall into and to
12 get plucked out for trafficking.
13 It reminds me of some of the work
14 that I've done where you had so
15 many experts who can see that the
16 system was ripe for gangs, for
17 example, right. You can see it's
18 happening. Let's get in there now.
19 If we don't get in there, people
20 will get in gangs. It's very
21 similar.

22 So I really appreciate
23 your looking from the outside in
24 and highlighting for us places

1 where we need to be careful that's
2 places to look. So I would love
3 all your expertise as much as you
4 can give it to us. Thank you.

5 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

6 Thank you both for your testimony.

7 Mr. Sham, would you call
8 the next panel.

9 THE CLERK: Jazmeen

10 Austin, Program Manager for
11 Salvation Army's New Day to Stop
12 Trafficking Community, Anti-
13 Trafficking Services Program;
14 Natalie Proud, Program Director of
15 Covenant House; Diane Mellie, US
16 Board Member, Stop the Traffic; and
17 Laquisha Anthony, Senior Manager of
18 Advocacy Philadelphia Center
19 Against Sexual Violence.

20 (Witnesses approached
21 witness table.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

23 Good afternoon, everyone. Thank
24 you for being here. Please state

1 your name and begin your testimony.

2 Start with Jazmeen.

3 MS. AUSTIN: Good

4 afternoon. My name is --

5 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

6 Bring the mic closer to you a

7 little bit.

8 MS. AUSTIN: Sorry.

9 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

10 Perfect. No problem. Yep, because

11 our stenographer has to hear.

12 MS. AUSTIN: Is that

13 better?

14 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Yes.

15 MS. AUSTIN: Good

16 afternoon. My name is Jazmeen

17 Austin and I'm the Program Manager

18 for the Salvation Army's New Day

19 Stop Trafficking Community Anti-

20 Trafficking Services. Every day I

21 work directly with survivors of

22 human trafficking who are

23 rebuilding their lives after

24 experiencing exploitation,

1 violence, coercion and profound
2 loss of control.

3 On behalf of the
4 Salvation Army, I want to thank
5 Councilwoman Dr. Nina Ahmad for her
6 continued leadership commitment and
7 unwavering dedication to ending
8 human trafficking in Philadelphia
9 and supporting survivors on their
10 paths to safety and stability. Her
11 advocacy sends a powerful message
12 to survivors that this city sees
13 them, believes them and is taking
14 action to protect their rights.
15 Thank you for your work in
16 introducing Bill No. 250990, which
17 adds human trafficking victim
18 status to the list of protected
19 categories against workplace
20 discrimination.

21 Last year, New Day
22 served 1335 survivors of human
23 trafficking across Philadelphia.
24 Of those survivors, 92 were

1 connected to housing, 342 were
2 enrolled into intensive case
3 management and 226 hours of
4 individualized case management were
5 provided.

6 Through our New Day New
7 Home program, we delivered 2326
8 nights of safe housing to survivors
9 actively exiting exploitation. And
10 at our Kensington Drop-In Center,
11 survivors accessed 1233 showers and
12 received 6930 meals, along with
13 basic lifesaving resources that
14 they may have been deprived of
15 while being trafficked.

16 These services are
17 crucial to giving survivors tools
18 that they need to escape and heal
19 from trafficking. Despite our work
20 and those of our partners
21 represented here today, we have
22 found that employment is one of the
23 most critical stabilizing forces in
24 a survivor's recovery. It provides

1 income, dignity, routine,
2 independence and the ability to
3 safely separate from an exploiter.
4 Yet for many survivors, employment
5 is also one of the most fragile
6 areas of their lives.

7 This bill recognizes a
8 hard reality that we see every day.
9 Trafficking victimization can
10 directly affect a person's ability
11 to obtain and sustain employment.
12 And without legal protection,
13 survivors are often punished for
14 the very harm that they endured. I
15 have worked with survivors who
16 endured hardships such as being
17 fired, demoted, have had hours
18 reduced once an employer becomes
19 aware of their trafficking history,
20 along with being denied time off
21 for court hearings, medical
22 appointments and mental health
23 treatments. These are just a few
24 examples of how survivors are

1 forced to choose between their
2 safety, their healing and their
3 livelihoods.

4 I have worked with a
5 survivor who was a single mother
6 struggling to gain financial
7 independence after her trafficking.
8 She has faced numerous barriers due
9 to employment gaps, inconsistent
10 records or limited documentation
11 due to her work being controlled by
12 her traffickers. These barriers
13 are often seen as irresponsibility
14 or poor character rather than the
15 result of coercion, violence and
16 forced labor.

17 This legislation matters
18 because it affirms that trafficking
19 victimization, like domestic
20 violence and sexual assault, is not
21 a personal failure. It is a crime
22 committed against someone and the
23 consequences of that crime should
24 not continue to follow survivors

1 into their jobs and their future
2 stability.

3 Employment protection is
4 not just a workplace issue. It is
5 a public safety issue, a recovery
6 issue, a long-term economic
7 stability issue. From my direct
8 professional experience, I have
9 witnessed the growth and the power
10 of survivors when they are
11 supported and maintaining
12 employment.

13 Their recovery outcomes
14 improve. They stabilize faster.
15 Their risk of re-exploitation
16 decreases. Their dependence on
17 emergency system drops. And most
18 importantly, their confidence and
19 self-sufficiency grows. This is
20 the first step through removing one
21 of the barriers that keep survivors
22 trapped in cycles of exploitation
23 and instability. Hopefully, it
24 will empower a survivor to heal

1 without fear of being punished for
2 what has been done to them.

3 I would like to thank
4 City Council and Councilmember
5 Dr. Ahmad for giving me this time
6 today. And on behalf of the 1335
7 survivors the Salvation Army served
8 last year, survivors we continue to
9 serve and the countless others
10 still hitting the exploitation, I
11 urge you to not stop here, but to
12 continue to bring this issue to the
13 forefront of City Council in our
14 city. Thank you again for your
15 leadership and commitment to
16 protecting human trafficking
17 survivors in Philadelphia.

18 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

19 Thank you.

20 Please proceed with your
21 name and testimony.

22 MS. PROUD: Good
23 afternoon, Council, Councilwoman
24 Ahmad. Thank you for your efforts

1 in bringing human trafficking
2 awareness and prevention to the
3 forefront of the foundation of
4 Philadelphia. My name is Natalie
5 Proud, and I am here to urge
6 Council to classify trafficking
7 survivors as a protected class in
8 employment discrimination.

9 I am the current Chair
10 of the Pennsylvanians against Human
11 Trafficking Advocacy Work Group as
12 well as the Co-chair of
13 Philadelphia Anti-Trafficking
14 Coalition. I also serve as the
15 Program Director for Covenant House
16 Pennsylvania, where we have
17 provided shelter, safety and
18 support for young people under 21,
19 experiencing homelessness,
20 trafficking and runaway situations
21 in Philadelphia since 1999.

22 On any given night, at
23 least 104 people sleep in one of
24 our residential programs. Every

1 youth who comes to our door is
2 screened using a validated
3 screening tool known as the Quick
4 Youth Indicators for Trafficking.
5 Through this screener, we are able
6 to identify survivors of both sex
7 and labor trafficking across all
8 genders.

9 At Covenant House
10 Pennsylvania, 1 in 5 youth we serve
11 has identified themselves as a
12 survivor of human trafficking.
13 This makes one thing painfully
14 clear: Trafficking is not a
15 distant issue. It is here in our
16 city, affecting our young people
17 every single day.

18 We know meaningful
19 employment is one of the strongest
20 predictors for long-term
21 independence, safety and recovery
22 for survivors. This reduces the
23 risk of re-exploitation, supports
24 financial independence, improves

1 mental health, strengthens
2 community integration and decreases
3 the likelihood of homelessness,
4 crime, substance use and premature
5 death.

6 The bill you are
7 introducing employment protections
8 for human trafficking survivors is
9 one aspect of supporting survivors
10 working towards financial
11 independence. Traffickers exploit
12 people for their own selfish
13 financial gain. Victims are forced
14 to hand over all money they earn
15 while traffickers strip them of
16 financial independence, personal
17 freedom, power and the basic right
18 to self-determination.

19 While being exploited,
20 some victims continue their normal
21 routines, such as going to work or
22 school, because traffickers do not
23 want to raise any red flags and
24 risk being caught. However,

1 victims often may miss days at work
2 unexpectedly due to the violent and
3 controlling nature of human
4 trafficking.

5 An example is a victim
6 unable to come into work due to
7 injuries from physical or sexual
8 assault by their trafficker. This
9 means they may have to stay in the
10 hospital or they have visible
11 injuries that prevent them from
12 going to work. These absences are
13 not choices. They are consequences
14 of violence after exiting their
15 life.

16 When survivors are
17 seeking employment, they may have
18 difficulties landing a position due
19 to their criminal records.
20 Traffickers will often force their
21 victims to commit crimes or take
22 blame for their traffickers'
23 crimes. In our city, victims have
24 been criminally charged with crimes

1 such as prostitution, drug dealing,
2 false ID to a cop, loitering, none
3 of which they were willing
4 participants. Because of the fear
5 traffickers instill in their
6 victims, along with ongoing trauma
7 and overall distrust of law
8 enforcement, victims will not
9 cooperate.

10 Additionally, due to the
11 general public lack of
12 understanding, survivors may face
13 further harm and exploitation in
14 the workplace. They may be
15 bullied, touched inappropriately,
16 asked to trade sexual favors for
17 promotions or overtime, given
18 unethical job responsibilities.

19 Survivors may be judged
20 or shamed for their past and
21 they're often asked things like why
22 didn't you just leave. Well, let
23 me ask you something: If you were
24 threatened to do something you

1 didn't want to do or your loved one
2 would be tortured and assaulted,
3 what would you do?

4 Well, if you ask a
5 survivor why didn't you just leave,
6 you may hear answers like they were
7 going to kill my son if I didn't do
8 what they wanted, I was afraid I'd
9 be deported if I went to the cops,
10 because my trafficker killed the
11 last person who tried.

12 Adopting this bill would
13 allow survivors to exist in a
14 system that doesn't further exploit
15 them, which they fought so hard to
16 escape. We have an opportunity to
17 create a space for survivors to
18 become part of the local economy,
19 not only in the workforce but also
20 in spending power.

21 This is the City of
22 Brotherly Love. Survivors deserve
23 fairness. They deserve dignity and
24 they deserve freedom from

1 exploitation, not just in theory
2 but in policy. If you want to get
3 more involved, I invite you to
4 attend our next community meeting
5 for the Philadelphia Anti-
6 Trafficking Coalition this Thursday
7 at 2:00 p.m. And we are also
8 hosting a Hill Day in Harrisburg on
9 January 28th.

10 We'll have a press
11 conference in the main Rotunda, and
12 then we're going to advocate for
13 legislation to be passed to protect
14 survivors, but also attack the
15 demand side of trafficking. Thank
16 you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
18 Thank you so much for your
19 testimony.

20 I want to acknowledge
21 our Council President who is here,
22 Mr. Kenyatta Johnson. Thank you
23 for being here.

24 Thank you for your

1 testimony. We'll ask questions
2 when you're all done. Go ahead,
3 Diane.

4 MS. MELLEY:

5 Thank you. Thank you,
6 Councilwoman Ahmad, for your
7 leadership on this critically issue
8 facing the world as well as our
9 region and to the other Committee
10 members. I'm here to support Bill
11 250990 for employment protection.

12 I'll make a few remarks
13 that really position this issue as
14 a big business and as a global
15 organized crime issue. So I'll
16 make brief remarks and then happy
17 to answer any questions. My name
18 is Diane Melley. I'm here on
19 behalf of Stop the Traffick. I'm a
20 USA trustee to Stop the Traffick.
21 We are a global organization
22 committed to preventing human
23 trafficking and safeguarding those
24 at risk.

1 For more than 20 years,
2 Stop the Traffick has pioneered an
3 intelligence-led, survivor-centered
4 model that brings together data,
5 technology, lived experience and
6 community action to prevent
7 exploitation before it takes root.
8 At Stop the Traffick, we believe
9 the safeguarding of workers' rights
10 is vital, vital because these
11 rights protect every worker,
12 including victims and survivors of
13 human trafficking from
14 discrimination, vital because they
15 allow survivors to step into stable
16 employment, one of the core
17 foundations of long-term recovery,
18 vital because strong worker
19 protections create the possibility
20 for a resilient, independent future
21 free from the cycles of
22 re-exploitation that so often trap
23 vulnerable people, and vital
24 because these protections are

1 upheld.

2 We safeguard not just
3 individuals today, but hold
4 generations ahead of us. We also
5 know that workers' rights don't
6 begin the moment someone starts a
7 job. Effective state safeguarding
8 helps us identify where
9 exploitation is happening, and it
10 helps stop people from becoming
11 victims in the first place.

12 Yet, the International
13 Labor Organization estimates that
14 forced labor within the supply
15 chains of private companies alone,
16 including those operating across
17 this city and state, is worth
18 \$64 billion a year. As Desmond
19 Tutu reminded us, we need to stop
20 pulling people out of the river.
21 We need to go upstream and find out
22 why they're falling in that
23 upstream work.

24 Finding the cause, not

1 just treating the consequence, is
2 exactly why Stop the Traffick
3 exists to do. Traffickers operate
4 like businesses. They exploit
5 vulnerability for profit. They
6 target major sporting events,
7 moments of crisis and online
8 spaces. They adapt quickly,
9 recruit strategically and generate
10 an estimated half a trillion
11 dollars annually from human
12 suffering.

13 To truly protect victims
14 and to prevent people from ever
15 being victimized, we must disrupt
16 that business model. Stop the
17 Traffick has built the
18 technological and analytical
19 infrastructure to do exactly that.
20 We use data and intelligence to
21 reveal how traffickers operate.
22 Through our group Global Traffic
23 Analysis Hub, we turn lived
24 experience into actionable

1 intelligence.

2 We work with financial
3 institutions, global companies,
4 community groups and frontline
5 organizations to make exploitation
6 riskier, less profitable and harder
7 to hide. When we combine insight
8 with coordinated action,
9 traffickers lose their power and
10 survivors regain theirs.

11 We have supported
12 legislation, legislative changes
13 before. Stop the Traffick was
14 instrumental in the development of
15 Section 54 of the UK Modern Slavery
16 Act, which set an international
17 benchmark for business transparency
18 and supply chain accountability.
19 That model has since been
20 replicated across Australia,
21 Canada, EU and several U.S. states.

22 We continue to advocate
23 for stronger due diligence
24 requirements so that companies must

1 not only report risk, but act on
2 it. Alongside legislative work, we
3 partner directly with businesses.
4 We provide strategic intelligence
5 on recruitment risks, supply chain,
6 red flags and best practices for
7 safeguarding.

8 We help businesses
9 recognize indicators of
10 trafficking, strengthening audits
11 and protect their workforce. Here
12 in Philadelphia we invite anyone
13 interested in this preventative
14 intelligence-led approach to
15 connect with us. Our work doesn't
16 stop with business. We collaborate
17 with banks, law enforcement and
18 more than 250 NGOs worldwide. And
19 crucially, we keep people with
20 lived experience at the center, not
21 defined by their exploitation, but
22 empowered to help shape solutions.
23 Their stories shared safely,
24 ethically and with consent, become

1 the intelligence that drives global
2 change here in Philadelphia.

3 Stop the Traffick is
4 already building a unique
5 collaboration across youth groups,
6 creative arts communities and
7 neighborhood organizations.

8 Through storytelling, education and
9 community-led intelligence, we are
10 equipping Philadelphians to
11 recognize the risk, disrupt
12 exploitation and become part of the
13 solution.

14 For these reasons, Stop
15 the Traffick strongly supports the
16 proposed legislation before Council
17 today. This bill offers vital
18 protection for survivors as they
19 rebuild their lives. We urge you
20 not only to pass this legislation,
21 but to ensure that Philadelphia's
22 broader strategic response
23 continues to move upstream, to find
24 exploitation early, to disrupt it

1 decisively and to prevent it from
2 happening in the first place.

3 A safer, more resilient
4 city is possible, and together,
5 through data collaboration and the
6 power of human stories, we can make
7 the future real again. Thank you
8 for your leadership and for your
9 commitment to protecting the most
10 vulnerable in our communities.
11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
13 Thank you for your testimony.

14 We'll go to Laquisha.

15 MS. ANTHONY: Good
16 afternoon, members of the Committee
17 of Public Health and Human Services
18 and all who are present here today.
19 Thank you, Councilmember Nina
20 Ahmad, for introducing this
21 legislation and for the continued
22 support to survivors. My name is
23 Laquisha Anthony, and I serve as
24 the Senior Manager of Advocacy at

1 WOAR Philadelphia Center Against
2 Sexual Violence, the only rape
3 crisis center in Philadelphia, an
4 organization that has been serving
5 the City of Philadelphia for over
6 53 years.

7 WOAR's mission is to
8 eliminate all forms of sexual
9 violence through specialized
10 treatment services, comprehensive
11 prevention education programs and
12 advocacy for the rights of victims
13 of sexual assault. WOAR is
14 dedicated to providing support to
15 survivors of sexual violence,
16 including those that are impacted
17 by human trafficking.

18 I'm here today to urge
19 support for trafficking victims
20 through legislation like this,
21 which prevents victims of human
22 trafficking from workplace
23 discrimination due to their human
24 trafficking victim status. Victims

1 of human trafficking are often
2 subjected to severe exploitation
3 and harassment, and this
4 legislation provides workplace
5 protection specifically for
6 individuals with human trafficking
7 victim status.

8 Trafficking is a
9 pervasive and often hidden crime
10 that operates in plain sight that
11 affects individuals of all ages,
12 genders and backgrounds. In
13 Philadelphia, it is a growing
14 concern that impacts the most
15 vulnerable populations, people
16 living in poverty, youth in foster
17 care, runaways, individuals who are
18 unhoused and those in marginalized
19 communities.

20 As one of the
21 organizations that make up the
22 Philadelphia Anti-Trafficking
23 Coalition who work on the front
24 lines of this crisis, we see the

1 profound physical, emotional,
2 economic and physiological toll
3 that trafficking has on victims.
4 Data shows that the vast majority
5 of trafficking victims identified
6 in United States are people who
7 have historically faced
8 discrimination and its political,
9 social and economic consequences.

10 People of color,
11 indigenous people, immigrants and
12 people who identify as LGBTQ+ are
13 disproportionately victimized.
14 People living in poverty, foster
15 care or struggling with addiction,
16 trauma, abuse and unstable housing
17 are all at comparatively higher
18 risk for trafficking.

19 Many survivors of human
20 trafficking face complex challenges
21 in rebuilding their lives,
22 including access to stable
23 employment, safe housing, health
24 care, legal aid and mental health

1 services. Human trafficking
2 doesn't happen in a vacuum though.
3 It is the end result of a range of
4 other persistent injustices and
5 inequalities in our society and our
6 economy.

7 Preventing human
8 trafficking at the scale of the
9 problem means changing the
10 underlying systems, the
11 inequalities and injustice we
12 mentioned, I mentioned above, that
13 make people vulnerable and
14 therefore make trafficking
15 possible.

16 This bill is a step in
17 that direction and our work across
18 Philadelphia, we see survivors of
19 human trafficking who are actively
20 trying to rebuild their lives
21 through employment. What often
22 stands in their way is not their
23 ability to work, but how their
24 lived experience is misread and

1 punished in the workplace. Many
2 trafficking survivors have gaps in
3 their employment or limited work
4 documentation. These gaps are not
5 signs of unreliability. They are
6 the direct result of force, fraud
7 and coercion.

8 Survivors are often
9 moved from place to place, forced
10 to work off the books and prevented
11 from keeping personal records and
12 identification themselves when they
13 later apply for jobs in
14 Philadelphia. These realities are
15 too often misinterpreted by
16 employers as dishonesty or lack of
17 commitment, when in fact they are
18 evidence of resilience and
19 survival.

20 We also see survivors
21 who miss work because they are
22 still facing real safety threats,
23 some that are actively being
24 trafficked while already employed

1 with traffickers controlling their
2 schedules, confiscating their
3 phones, monitoring communication
4 and forcing them to miss shifts.
5 Others are navigating ongoing
6 criminal cases, restraining orders,
7 investigations instead of support.

8 These survivors are
9 disciplined and terminated for
10 their circumstances rooted in
11 danger and coercion, not poor work
12 ethic. Survivors also need time
13 away from work for court hearings
14 and medical treatment and mental
15 health care. These are essential
16 lifesaving services. Without clear
17 legal protection, survivors in
18 Philadelphia are denied time off
19 and punished for attending
20 appointments that are directly tied
21 to their safety and their recovery.

22 Finally, many survivors
23 face harmful stereotypes in a
24 workplace. They are labeled

1 problematic or unstable or blamed
2 for their own exploitation. These
3 attitudes create toxic work
4 environments that often lead to
5 termination, harassment and
6 isolation. No one should be forced
7 to endure shame and stigma simply
8 for surviving abuse. Philadelphia
9 has long prided itself on being a
10 city that stands for equity and
11 justice.

12 Bill 250990 is aligned
13 with those values. It ensures that
14 survivors are not locked out of
15 stable employment because of trauma
16 that was inflicted upon them. I
17 urge you to vote on Bill 250990 and
18 I thank you for your time and
19 commitment to our city's most
20 vulnerable population and
21 vulnerable residents, survivors of
22 sexual assault and human
23 trafficking.

24 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

1 Thank you. Thank you so much to
2 all of you for your testimony. I
3 have a question for Natalie about
4 the human trafficking screen you
5 mentioned. Could you elaborate on
6 that quickly?

7 MS. PROUD: Sure. So
8 since Covenant House's inception,
9 we've serviced survivors of
10 trafficking. We weren't able to
11 really screen properly for that.
12 The reason that it's important to
13 screen for that is so they get the
14 services that are dedicated to
15 their complex traumas and ongoing
16 safety issues typically at the same
17 time.

18 So Covenant House New
19 Jersey created a tool called the
20 Quick Youth Indicators for
21 Trafficking. It was validated by
22 Mount Sinai University. It is for
23 specifically 18- to 21-year-olds,
24 and it's for questions, yes, no,

1 don't know, refused, that can
2 potentially identify someone as
3 someone who has been victimized by
4 trafficking.

5 I've never met a
6 survivor who came to me and was
7 like, hi, I'm a survivor, and I
8 need housing. And so, this was a
9 way for us to make sure that we
10 have the numbers to support the
11 dedicated services. And also, we
12 don't want survivors telling their
13 story to everyone who they come in
14 contact with all the time.

15 We also heard from
16 survivors that sometimes they
17 didn't tell their case managers or
18 other staff and organizations
19 because they were afraid to get
20 them wrapped up in some criminal
21 case or maybe they thought we had
22 to tell the police. So under Act
23 105 of 2014 of Pennsylvania, people
24 who are deemed human trafficking

1 experts actually have
2 confidentiality to speak with
3 traffickers.

4 So at Covenant House
5 Pennsylvania, if anyone answers yes
6 to one of those four questions,
7 they're referred to myself or chief
8 program officer and they can speak
9 in full confidentiality. Meaning,
10 we don't have to tell the law
11 enforcement if they don't want to.
12 We have partners that we can work
13 with. Obviously, if they are
14 minors, mandated reporting of
15 trafficking is considered a
16 mandated report, but the quick
17 youth indicators for trafficking is
18 actually just for 18- to 21-year-
19 olds. And so, I can send you, if
20 you want, the research study that
21 was done on it and validated.

22 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
23 Yeah, I was just wondering can this
24 be used by law enforcement in any

1 kind of way to be able to identify,
2 to just start screening people?
3 For example, during our training we
4 got the example of someone who was
5 shoplifting who was actually a
6 trafficked person, because they
7 were shoplifting to feed their drug
8 habit because their trafficker said
9 you have to shoplift X number of
10 dollars worth before I will give
11 you your next hit.

12 So on the surface that's
13 a soft shoplifter, right. So if we
14 had a system similar, maybe
15 something like this where when you
16 see something like that, you're
17 able to separate people to say,
18 okay, this person has these other
19 vulnerabilities. That's the line
20 of thinking. I was going to say
21 can we do that, particularly for
22 our law enforcement, our beat cops,
23 right, our street cops who
24 encounter a lot of people, if it's

1 in, say, a place like Kensington,
2 right. But if it was online,
3 there's a whole other scenario. So
4 thank you for that. We'll follow
5 up to talk to you more about that.

6 Anybody have any other
7 questions?

8 Okay. Councilman
9 O'Rourke.

10 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:
11 From all the testimony today, I am
12 just reminded of how large events
13 become kind of a breeding ground,
14 or at least kind of an open-air
15 marketplace for this. And so,
16 obviously in light of 2026 we are
17 on the world stage, but even more
18 so in a meaningful way.

19 Beyond this fabulous
20 bill that has been brought before
21 y'all, before the Council today, is
22 there anything else that we ought
23 to be doing, what steps this
24 Council need to be taking to

1 mitigate as much as possible human
2 trafficking in our city? I would
3 love to get that before the year
4 closes out, if you have any
5 suggestions.

6 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

7 Before you answer, I just want to
8 make sure he knows about -- some of
9 my colleagues might not know that
10 we're actually embarking on a Human
11 Trafficking Awareness and
12 Prevention Campaign for 2026 with
13 you mentioned multiple partners,
14 including many of these folks who
15 are going to advise us on what that
16 looks like.

17 There's going to be sort
18 of a branding and messaging
19 component to it and then a
20 coordination component where we
21 will be kind of understanding
22 what's happening on the ground and
23 what sort of in realtime do we need
24 to do. The goal is for the public

1 to have much more awareness than
2 they do and to give the public some
3 tools, what can you do if you were
4 to do this. But most importantly,
5 to elevate the issue.

6 So past 2026, when this,
7 you know, using this as an impetus
8 and that's how I got the budget
9 allocation. However, past 2026 we
10 need to continue to really amp it
11 up to the point that we made with
12 the DA that we need to be, you
13 know, firing on all cylinders on
14 this.

15 So just before they
16 answer, I just wanted to make sure
17 you had that awareness of what we
18 were embarking on.

19 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:
20 Thank you, Madam Chair. Please go
21 ahead.

22 MS. MELLEY: I would say
23 Councilmember Ahmad is spot-on,
24 that this is such a large issue

1 that we give full credit to
2 Philadelphia for recognizing that
3 when these large events, like the
4 FIFA World Cup, like the
5 Semiquincentennial, we are going to
6 see massive increases.

7 This is not just about a
8 john, as you were calling earlier
9 on a corner, but there is organized
10 crime around the world that will
11 move tens of thousands of people
12 into our region to be sold
13 across -- so again, congratulations
14 to the Councilwoman for beginning
15 the communications campaign. And
16 the awareness organizations like
17 ours have apps that can be provided
18 to help with that communication.

19 We work very closely
20 with Polaris and others around the
21 world. We have another, as I
22 mentioned in my remarks, as we move
23 from communication and awareness
24 and you start to build the

1 infrastructure in our city to be
2 able to have all of the parts that
3 were addressed today, the police,
4 the DA, City Council, others work
5 together. That takes data, that
6 takes technology.

7 I really appreciated the
8 young woman earlier in her
9 testimony, those systems can begin
10 to be built here. We saw the data
11 when the Paris Olympics were
12 happening and we were working
13 there, you could begin to see
14 months in advance the hourly rates
15 of workers going up. So those
16 kinds of things, we are already
17 collaborating and providing to
18 Philadelphia, what we're starting
19 to see money moving and people
20 moving to come into our region next
21 year.

22 And we will also be
23 looking as we work in other cities,
24 other FIFA cities in particular,

1 and we happen to have one not that
2 far by in New Jersey where we will
3 see the workers move from our
4 region up to New Jersey and vice
5 versa.

6 So your question is
7 excellent, Councilmember O'Rourke,
8 that we're starting something but
9 it's enormous and using this
10 momentum to protect and make aware
11 as much as we can right now, but
12 begin to lay the tracks to build
13 the infrastructure so we stop this
14 problem long-term.

15 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:
16 Thank you very much. And thank
17 you, Madam Chair.

18 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
19 Thank you.

20 Anybody have any other
21 questions for our panel?

22 (No response.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: We
24 actually have a lot of questions,

1 but the time is late so we will do
2 some follow-up, and I will inform
3 our Committee with some more things
4 that we might get from you so that
5 we are advised, not just for this
6 particular bill, but this issue, so
7 we can talk more about it.

8 So anybody have any
9 other questions for our panel?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

12 Seeing none, thank you very much
13 for your testimony. We really
14 appreciate it.

15 Mr. Sham, do we have any
16 more panels to speak on?

17 THE CLERK: Madam Chair,
18 there are no additional panels.

19 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

20 Okay. We will now transition to
21 our public comment session. Please
22 note that the time limit for each
23 speaker is three minutes, if we can
24 squeeze it in.

1 Mr. Sham, would you call
2 the first speaker for public
3 comment.

4 THE CLERK: We have one
5 public person offering public
6 comment, Jen Bittner.

7 (Witnesses approached
8 witness table.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
10 Thank you. Please state your name
11 and begin your testimony.

12 MS. BITTNER: Hi,
13 everyone. My name is Jen Bittner.
14 I'm sorry. I can do this. Please
15 bear with me. I did not plan on
16 speaking today, but I'm tired as a
17 survivor of feeling scared. I'm
18 tired of feeling terrified of
19 speaking my truth.

20 I'm terrified -- I'm
21 sick and tired of feeling terrified
22 of the stigma, the discrimination
23 and the judgment that is constantly
24 placed on victims. Let me pull up

1 my notes so I'm actually speaking
2 from my notes and I'll stay on
3 track. I'm a survivor and an
4 advocate.

5 This is new for me and
6 it's absolutely terrifying. I
7 wasn't planning on speaking because
8 I didn't feel ready, but I'm
9 feeling inspired thanks to my
10 friend Jackie and all the women
11 that are a part of Philly
12 Feminists. I don't want to be
13 scared of owning my truth, like I
14 said. I want to stand up for myself
15 and others.

16 I wrote this five
17 minutes ago so please bear with me.
18 As a survivor of trafficking, I've
19 struggled a lot. I've struggled
20 with getting out of bed every
21 morning, going to sleep at night,
22 going to work, putting on a fake
23 smile at work. I've always worked
24 in industries where I provide

1 service to others. So it's very,
2 very hard to put on a mask every
3 single day and act like I'm okay.

4 At times, I've even been
5 tempted to go back down the same
6 road and environment where my
7 trafficker found me because I've
8 felt stuck in survival mode for a
9 very long time. And at times, I
10 feel like there is no escape. This
11 bill would provide a sense of
12 safety and security while trying to
13 rebuild your life that survivors
14 rarely feel and desperately need.

15 It truly has been
16 debilitating for me and so many
17 others. The part that has made it
18 most difficult for me is the
19 stigma, judgment and discrimination
20 that is often associated with
21 victims. The discrimination and
22 judgment makes it hard and scary to
23 explain the job gaps and why you're
24 struggling mentally and/or

1 physically.

2 Years ago I was involved
3 in a case against my perpetrator.
4 I was connected with a detective
5 and an FBI agent and I was helping
6 him build a case against my
7 perpetrator and it didn't go
8 anywhere, and we could talk about
9 that another time.

10 But I was going through
11 the court process. And at one
12 point, my lawyer advised me to do
13 mediation and settle. And why is
14 that? Because the stigma that is
15 associated with survivors -- and
16 this is an extremely common issue
17 which keeps survivors stuck in
18 survival mode and keeps them from
19 healing, because they are told by
20 their lawyers and whoever else if
21 you go to trial, you are going to
22 be shamed, you are going to be
23 blamed and you are going to be
24 retraumatized.

1 So is it worth it for
2 you to actually go to trial and
3 then you might not even get
4 justice. And we are told that as
5 survivors -- and that's where I
6 think the problem is. We need to
7 stop speaking to survivors in this
8 way and disempowering them from
9 receiving justice.

10 I'm going off of my
11 notes. I get very passionate. Our
12 culture and how trafficking is
13 spoken about needs to change. If
14 survivors felt protected by their
15 employers and community, more
16 victims would stand up and speak
17 out. Instead, so many of us hide
18 in the shadows and continue to feel
19 imprisoned by our truth while
20 perpetrators continue to walk free.

21 Not only that, but we
22 have been shown in our current
23 reality that perpetrators are
24 protected by our systems and

1 they're even given power and
2 wealth. When I got out of my
3 situation, I wasn't even fully
4 aware that I was a victim of
5 trafficking. In fact, it took me
6 years to accept and admit that to
7 myself and view myself in that way.

8 It took me -- I just
9 kept working and struggling while
10 trying to get my life together as
11 quickly as possible. As a child
12 survivor of sexual assault, I
13 already knew about the stigma that
14 surrounds survivors. Since I was 4
15 years old, I've been scared to
16 speak up and use my voice.

17 I knew victims were
18 either not believed or blamed and
19 shamed, so I made excuses for my
20 job gap and kept working, kept
21 struggling financially while
22 battling complex PTSD and mental
23 health issues, because I knew the
24 public and my workplace would

1 either not care or would not
2 recognize my trauma as trauma.

3 It was hard enough for
4 me to accept it and recognize that
5 I was a survivor. So why would
6 they look at me as a survivor. I
7 didn't know at the time that I
8 could possibly qualify for certain
9 resources, disability. I actually
10 just found that out earlier. I
11 really was just on my own figuring
12 everything out. And when I got out
13 of my situation, it was the
14 beginning of 2020. And as I said,
15 I was working with or I was in
16 contact with someone, a detective,
17 an FBI agent.

18 But the big problem is
19 that resources are very limited and
20 they're spread thin. And at that
21 time, the Super Bowl was about to
22 take place. And as many of us
23 know, the Super Bowl is a very
24 large event for human trafficking.

1 And so, resources were very limited
2 and I was basically forgotten
3 about, and then COVID hit. And so,
4 I was dealing with all of that
5 coming out of that situation and
6 then was sent right into COVID
7 while trying to rebuild my life.
8 And I felt extremely alone. I just
9 didn't really know that there was
10 even resources out there for me. I
11 had no education. I wasn't given
12 any resources.

13 In fact, I only went
14 through trauma therapy last year
15 because I started looking into
16 advocacy work, hoping that that
17 would help me heal and find peace
18 within myself. And luckily, victim
19 services in Montgomery County
20 informed me that I could receive
21 free therapy, but that wasn't told
22 to me by the detective or police,
23 anyone that was ever involved with
24 my case or knew about it.

1 As I mentioned earlier,
2 as I'm saying right now, education
3 is extremely important. I think
4 it's vital for survivors well-being
5 and healing that employers and
6 community understand what
7 trafficking is and how it affects
8 survivors, and that looks different
9 for everyone.

10 It's crucial for
11 survivors to be given grace and
12 support while they are actively
13 trying to rebuild their life.
14 Rebuilding my life has been
15 difficult and not being aware of
16 the resources available to me has
17 made it even harder. That's all I
18 have right there.

19 And luckily, I do want
20 to say I'm very, very, very
21 grateful that I have privilege and
22 that's why I'm here today,
23 exercising my privilege in a
24 productive way to try to make

1 positive changes in our community
2 and in our world. And I'm very,
3 very blessed and grateful that I
4 had a home to go to when I got out
5 of that situation. I was sleeping
6 in my mother's living room, but I
7 would have taken a living room over
8 the streets. And I was very, very
9 privileged and I will never take
10 that for granted.

11 But a lot of survivors
12 are not that privileged. And I
13 went right back into serving and
14 bartending when I came out of that,
15 and I was able to kind of just say,
16 oh, I have a job gap because I was
17 a dancer in an exotic club at one
18 point and I didn't really, you
19 know, know what to say about it.
20 So I just blamed it on my past
21 choices of working in a club, even
22 though that wasn't even telling a
23 fraction of the story.

24 And I just continue to

1 work and work and work and feel
2 that constant pressure to work and
3 provide for myself that I felt
4 while I was being trafficked. I've
5 just always been in this survival
6 mode and I really hope that you
7 guys pass this bill today and thank
8 you for giving me an opportunity to
9 speak.

10 Thank you to Philly
11 Feminist for inspiring me to step
12 into this advocacy role and speak
13 up and stand up for myself and
14 others and inviting me here today.
15 I am very, very grateful for all of
16 you and all of your time. Thank
17 you so much.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

20 Thank you so very much. I can't
21 tell you how grateful we are to you
22 and all of those who have
23 testified, particularly those who
24 are survivors. Because not only is

1 it eye-opening for us to hear this,
2 but this is what is going to drive
3 policy, the real, lived experience
4 of people.

5 It's great to hear from
6 experts and everybody else, but
7 nothing substitutes for knowing
8 what you've been going through and
9 what you've been facing. So I'm
10 deeply grateful that you are here
11 sharing in spite of the pain this
12 is causing you as you're doing
13 this. We understand that, but it
14 takes leadership like this to be
15 able to get us to a point where we
16 can address this in a holistic
17 manner and treat it as a public
18 health issue and really look to
19 make solutions for it. So thank
20 you. Thank you so much for your
21 testimony.

22 Mr. Sham, do we have any
23 other public testimony?

24 THE CLERK:

1 Madam Chair, there are
2 no other speakers on the public
3 comment list.

4 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
5 Thank you very much. Since there
6 are no other speakers, I would like
7 to thank all our witnesses for
8 joining us today. We will now end
9 the public hearing and go into the
10 public meeting.

11 Mr. Sham, would you
12 please call the roll.

13 THE CLERK: Chair Ahmad.

14 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
15 Present.

16 THE CLERK: Vice-Chair
17 Lozada.

18 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:
19 Present.

20 THE CLERK:
21 Councilmember Thomas.

22 (No response.)

23 THE CLERK:
24 Councilmember Driscoll.

1 (No response.)

2 THE CLERK:

3 Councilmember Bass.

4 (No response.)

5 THE CLERK:

6 Councilmember Landau.

7 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

8 Present.

9 THE CLERK: And,
10 Councilmember O'Rourke.

11 COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:
12 Present.

13 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I
14 will note for the record that a
15 quorum of the committee is present.

16 The Chair now recognizes
17 Councilmember Lozada for a motion
18 on Bill No. 250990.

19 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:
20 Thank you, Madam Chair.

21 I move that Bill No.
22 250990 be reported from this
23 committee with a favorable
24 recommendation and further move

1 that the rules of Council be
2 suspended to permit first reading
3 of this bill at the next session of
4 Council.

5 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Any
6 second?

7 (Duly seconded.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: It
9 has been moved and properly
10 seconded that Bill No. 250990 be
11 reported from this committee with a
12 favorable recommendation and
13 further move that the rules of
14 Council be suspended to permit
15 first reading of this bill at the
16 next session of Council.

17 All those in favor of
18 the motion will signify by saying
19 aye.

20 (Aye.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: The
22 ayes have it -- any opposed?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: The

1 ayes have it. I went ahead of
2 myself. In the opinion of the
3 Chair, the ayes have it. The
4 motion carries. Bill No. 250990
5 will be reported from this
6 committee with a favorable
7 recommendation with the request
8 that the rules of Council be
9 suspended to permit first reading
10 at the next session of Council.

11 This concludes the
12 business before the Committee on
13 Public Health and Human Services
14 today. Thank you all very much for
15 your attendance.

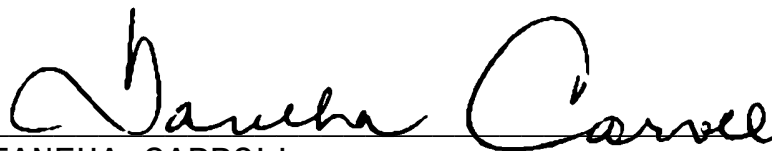
16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:
18 Yes, we can clap it up. First time
19 in the history of Philadelphia Code
20 are we going to introduce the word
21 "human trafficking," so thanks to
22 all of you. Thank you so much.

23 (Committee on the
24 Environment concluded at 4:17 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings
and evidence noted are contained fully and
accurately in the stenographic notes taken
by me in the foregoing matter, and that
this is a correct transcript of the same.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Taneha Carroll". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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\$	2025 20:4	53 125:6
\$25,000 66:20 67:9	2026 12:14 54:7 74:10 136:16 137:12 138:6,9	54 121:15
\$64 119:18	21 110:18	6
1	21-year- 134:18	62% 67:15
1 5:8 111:10	21-year-olds 132:23	6930 105:12
1-888-373-7888 7:19,20	226 105:3	7
10 13:17	23 64:20	7 5:22
10% 69:11	2326 105:7	71 5:13
100% 20:24	25 80:7	7th 77:15
1000 5:21	250 122:18	9
104 110:23	250990 4:2,20 9:18 65:8 71:8 77:19 104:16 117:11 131:12,17 156:18,22 157:10 158:4	9-1100 4:2
105 133:23	267-838-5866 7:23,24	90% 67:17
11 13:23	28th 116:9	92 104:24
11-year-old 13:9,23 14:22 20:5	2:00 116:7	A
1233 105:11	3	aback 32:3
1335 104:22 109:6	3 5:8	ability 87:12 106:2,10 128:23
15 18:7,8	30% 67:8	absences 113:12
18 74:6 80:6	342 105:1	absolutely 27:13 45:9 48:9 74:3 79:5 144:6
18- 132:23 134:18	38 33:21	abuse 90:23 127:16 131:8
1999 110:21	4	accept 14:12 148:6 149:4
2	4 148:14	access 85:18 127:22
20 118:1	43% 66:18	accessed 105:11
2013 14:7	45 17:17	accommodation 61:7 71:21
2014 133:23	4:17 158:24	accommodations 70:13, 20 86:20
2016 56:14	5	accountability 97:12 98:17 100:12 121:18
2017 56:14	5 111:10	
2020 149:14	5% 5:19	
2023 66:11		
2024 22:22 48:21		

accountable 36:23 93:18 94:3 100:3 achievement 34:20 acknowledge 116:20 act 34:8 70:21 83:20 121:16 122:1 133:22 145:3 action 57:23 66:6 104:14 118:6 121:8 actionable 120:24 actively 83:10 105:9 128:19 129:23 151:12 activity 23:10,23 24:2 38:15 40:14,20 44:14 actors 53:24 adapt 120:8 adaptable 85:7 add 4:6,20 added 51:4 addiction 29:24 127:15 additional 142:18 Additionally 114:10 address 10:1 19:22 28:10 81:14 154:16 addressed 40:22 140:3 addressing 29:22 61:23 adds 104:17 administration 42:16,17 admit 148:6 Adopting 115:12 adults 14:14 advance 44:15 140:14 advanced 44:6 advantage 25:5 advise 137:15	advised 142:5 146:12 advocacy 78:2 83:11 87:1 102:18 104:11 110:11 124:24 125:12 150:16 153:12 advocate 76:10,12 78:18 81:12 91:10 116:12 121:22 144:4 advocates 6:24 86:4 affect 106:10 affecting 111:16 affects 126:11 151:7 affirms 107:18 afraid 115:8 133:19 afternoon 4:17 9:23 27:15 32:2 64:8 82:14 102:23 103:4,16 109:23 124:16 age 83:8 agencies 17:20 47:11 50:12 54:23 agency 48:11 agency's 49:4 agent 146:5 149:17 agents 57:4 ages 126:11 agree 56:12 59:15 89:9 90:16 ahead 82:11 117:2 119:4 138:21 158:1 Ahmad 4:11 8:9 9:7,11 19:11,24 22:17 23:12 25:12 27:12 28:6 31:22 42:7 47:16 49:8 51:18 52:24 59:14 63:14,20 64:10 72:12,18 75:2,24 76:16 81:24 82:10 88:5 92:23 99:11,15 100:17 102:5,22 103:5,9,14 104:5 109:5,18,24 116:17	117:6 124:12,20 131:24 134:22 137:6 138:23 141:18,23 142:11,19 143:9 153:19 155:4,13,14 156:13 157:5,8,21,24 158:17 Ahmad's 77:17 aid 127:24 ailments 80:1 alarm 54:21 alarming 5:12 Alcohol 44:19 alert 55:8 aligned 131:12 aligns 71:9 allocation 138:9 allowed 5:2 allowing 37:14 Alongside 122:2 Alternatively 51:7 amending 4:2 Americans 70:20 amp 138:10 Analysis 120:23 analyst 78:4 analysts 44:7,11 45:11 analytical 120:18 and/or 145:24 Angela 11:3 announcements 62:19 annually 96:20 120:11 answers 115:6 134:5 Anthony 102:17 124:15, 23 anti- 47:3 71:22 102:12 103:19 116:5
--	---	---

anti-trafficking 47:9 64:16 82:24 110:13 126:22 anticipate 19:6 applaud 11:10 Applause 153:18 158:16 applies 70:1 apply 129:13 appointments 106:22 130:20 appreciated 18:14 140:7 apprehending 51:22 approach 69:23 90:2,10 95:13 122:14 approached 76:14 102:20 143:7 appropriately 24:7 38:17 apps 139:17 area 11:15 46:4 56:21 70:24 91:2 93:1 areas 106:6 arena 28:10 Army 7:15,22 82:23 104:4 109:7 Army's 102:11 103:18 arrest 38:9,12 39:3 52:2 arrested 21:22 26:10,13 32:7 38:4 67:16 arresting 36:21 37:4 arrests 27:20 28:3 33:10, 11 34:10 35:12 67:18 arts 123:6 aspect 112:9 assault 8:22 10:18 11:5 14:20 15:11 27:18 55:2,3 107:20 113:8 125:13 131:22 148:12	assaulted 115:2 assaults 5:20 asserting 70:23 assigned 78:5 Assistant 10:5 assumptions 84:8 85:11 attack 116:14 attacked 21:16,18 attend 46:24 116:4 attendance 158:15 attended 48:19 attending 130:19 attention 54:24 81:21 attitudes 131:3 Attorney 9:20,22 10:22 20:23 22:24 23:18 26:7 29:10 33:5 37:17 40:7 41:15 42:18,24 46:11 56:9 63:18 Attorney's 47:6 57:3 attorneys 15:16 audits 122:10 Austin 102:10 103:3,8,12, 15,17 Australia 121:20 avoid 29:19 85:21 aware 12:2 38:23 106:19 141:10 148:4 151:15 awareness 60:9 88:16 110:2 137:11 138:1,17 139:16,23 awful 31:3 40:15 aye 157:19,20 ayes 157:22 158:1,3	B back 21:9 29:3,8 33:19,22 49:4 73:3 145:5 152:13 backed 66:10 background 83:8 backgrounds 126:12 backwards 83:22 bad 19:7 24:16,17 31:14 85:4 bandwidth 43:12 45:7 banks 122:17 Barack 10:14 barrier 67:22 87:13 barriers 7:8 65:24 68:5 84:14 107:8,12 108:21 bartending 152:14 based 31:18 36:8 45:20 64:15 basic 67:4 86:10 105:13 112:17 basically 34:2 150:2 basis 4:8 Bass 156:3 battle 13:8,9 14:1 95:19 battling 148:22 bear 143:15 144:17 beat 135:22 bed 144:20 begin 7:11,12 67:4 76:18 77:16 82:12 103:1 119:6 140:9,13 141:12 143:11 beginning 38:8 139:14 149:14 behalf 78:19 104:3 109:6 117:19
---	---	---

believed 148:18 believes 104:13 benchmark 121:17 benefit 58:9,10 bias 71:15 big 57:18 90:12,17 98:13 117:14 149:18 biggest 50:8 51:17 bill 4:1,20 6:16 9:18 22:7 65:8 68:23 69:21 71:8 72:10 76:22 77:9,19 81:20 82:3 83:18,19 86:18 87:16 104:16 106:7 112:6 115:12 117:10 123:17 128:16 131:12,17 136:20 142:6 145:11 153:7 156:18,21 157:3, 10,15 158:4 billion 119:18 Billions 56:6 bit 14:20 42:13 77:5 79:7 92:16 103:7 Bittner 143:6,12,13 blame 11:11 22:14 113:22 blamed 131:1 146:23 148:18 152:20 blaming 11:11,17 53:13 blessed 152:3 Board 102:16 Bob 10:8 body 93:14 books 129:10 Bowl 149:21,23 boys 14:24 branding 137:18 bread 16:9 break 80:3	breeding 136:13 briefly 21:2 bring 37:6 103:6 109:12 bringing 110:1 brings 44:19,20,21 72:10 118:4 broader 123:22 broadly 70:1 broken 98:7 Brotherly 115:22 brought 8:14 23:9 26:13 72:20 136:20 budget 18:23 138:8 build 52:7 67:5 87:21 139:24 141:12 146:6 building 64:23 72:2 74:18 123:4 built 120:17 140:10 bullied 114:15 burden 73:6 bus 36:13 business 40:12 49:24 53:3,6 117:14 120:16 121:17 122:16 158:12 businesses 120:4 122:3,8 butter 16:9 buying 25:18 buys 53:6 C call 4:12 9:12 21:20 32:5 63:23 76:6 81:11 102:7 143:1 155:12 called 80:22 132:19 calling 139:8 campaign 54:7 60:2,21	62:18 137:12 139:15 Canada 121:21 capability 85:10 capable 15:24 capacity 41:4,8 78:17 96:3 car 13:10 care 11:1 61:4 80:13 85:19 91:1 100:2 126:17 127:15,24 130:15 149:1 career 10:8 33:20 36:10 64:22 careers 15:19 careful 33:17 102:1 CARES 17:14 90:10 caring 19:13 carries 158:4 carry 73:7 carrying 6:5 cars 34:5 cascade 55:10 case 14:1,10 16:5 27:5 38:1,14 44:24 48:7,9 50:20 51:19,21 52:7 59:18 105:2,4 133:17,21 146:3,6 150:24 cases 15:12 16:3,11,16 17:2 23:3,6 27:24 33:23 37:19,21 39:8 44:19,20, 21,22 45:18 48:1,6,13,14, 23 51:8 95:14 130:6 categories 4:22 8:12 104:19 caught 112:24 caused 67:21 causing 53:18 154:12 caveat 76:21
---	---	--

cell 43:21 45:12,13 92:8 center 73:13 102:18 105:10 122:20 125:1,3 centers 97:14 central 68:20 centuries 21:10 CEO 64:5,14 certification 69:9,22 chain 121:18 122:5 chains 119:15 Chair 28:21 75:10 82:14 110:9 138:20 141:17 142:17 155:1,13 156:16, 20 158:3 challenge 85:9 challenges 65:5 66:9 127:20 challenging 15:14 chance 5:3 72:8 change 4:24 60:16 94:16 123:2 147:13 changed 20:19 40:11 changing 128:9 Chapter 4:2 character 107:14 charge 50:22 51:3 charged 51:9 113:24 charges 37:7 51:2 charging 51:1 check 26:11,16 43:4 Chester 56:19,21 Chicago 96:18 chief 10:13,16 27:10 134:7 child 61:12,17 78:8 82:17 90:23 148:11	children 39:24 66:23 67:24 68:15 choices 35:24 113:13 152:21 choose 87:17 107:1 choosing 84:10 chronic 80:2 circle 29:3 circumstances 85:4 130:10 cited 67:16 cities 39:6 59:2 140:23,24 citizen 78:17 city 18:6 26:23 29:2 43:13 44:3 45:9 47:12 53:12,16 59:1 71:1,12 75:18 78:13 79:4 80:7 83:9 87:5 89:5, 11,23 90:11 96:23 104:12 109:4,13,14 111:16 113:23 115:21 119:17 124:4 125:5 131:10 137:2 140:1,4 city's 69:6 82:24 131:19 civic 83:20 87:6 civil 71:11 claim 36:11 clap 158:18 clarify 99:14 class 86:16 110:7 classify 110:6 classmates 83:6 clear 7:7 17:21 35:2 38:7 62:8 63:1 69:24 111:14 130:16 CLERK 4:1 9:14 64:1 76:9 102:9 142:17 143:4 154:24 155:13,16,20,23 156:2,5,9	client 58:9 close 11:6 45:2 closely 18:1 78:15 139:19 closer 72:11 103:6 closes 137:4 closing 72:6 club 152:17,21 Co-chair 77:24 110:12 coalition 50:5 83:1 110:14 116:6 126:23 Code 4:3 5:1 158:19 coerced 12:7,23 coercion 67:21 104:1 107:15 129:7 130:11 collaborate 122:16 collaborating 140:17 collaboration 42:14 46:9 123:5 124:5 collaborative 46:15 47:13 collaboratively 48:4 colleague 4:15 8:8 colleagues 8:2 22:19 75:4 83:6 137:9 collectively 19:21 color 127:10 combination 43:20 45:20 combine 121:7 comment 142:21 143:3,6 155:3 comments 8:2 11:9 56:11 Commercial 81:15 Commission 9:16 commissioner 33:15 35:10 36:6,7 54:5 commissioner's 89:2
--	--	--

commit 113:21 commitment 17:9 81:22 104:6 109:15 124:9 129:17 131:19 committed 14:21,23 18:20 19:15 107:22 117:22 committee 77:21 82:14 83:1 87:11 93:13 117:9 124:16 142:3 156:15,23 157:11 158:6,12,23 common 33:23 65:23 146:16 Commonwealth 5:15 communication 63:12 130:3 139:18,23 communications 45:21 139:15 communities 68:13 74:19 123:6 124:10 126:19 community 8:16 19:15 32:9 79:23 102:12 103:19 112:2 116:4 118:6 121:4 147:15 151:6 152:1 community-based 90:9 community-led 123:9 companies 119:15 121:3, 24 comparatively 127:17 compare 48:5 compelled 79:11 compelling 45:5 completing 46:1 complex 80:1 127:20 132:15 148:22 component 50:20 137:19, 20 comprehensive 72:2 125:10	computer 76:3 79:10 concern 58:12 126:14 concerned 39:18 concerns 69:16 84:20 concluded 158:24 concludes 158:11 concomitant 52:2 concrete 88:20 conditions 4:10 conduct 12:6 conducted 65:15 66:14 conference 13:4 116:11 confidence 108:18 confidentiality 134:2,9 confiscated 43:22 confiscating 130:2 confusing 92:17 congratulations 139:13 Congress 28:17 connect 122:15 connected 85:20 105:1 146:4 connection 8:24 79:2 consent 122:24 consequence 21:24 120:1 consequences 17:4 30:7, 15 38:18 57:7 59:12 65:13 107:23 113:13 127:9 considered 134:15 constant 61:24 62:1,3 153:2 constantly 73:5 143:23 constituents 83:7 contact 133:14 149:16	content 88:10 context 34:9 45:16 continually 80:17 continue 15:21 19:18 68:9 69:5 72:1 94:24 107:24 109:8,12 112:20 121:22 138:10 147:18,20 152:24 continued 104:6 124:21 continues 10:12 67:1 123:23 contracted 17:19 contradiction 84:9 control 35:7 40:5 104:2 controlled 107:11 controlling 113:3 130:1 convening 77:21 conversation 34:6 54:4 convicted 14:8 conviction 5:23 13:6 25:11 Cook 96:16 cooperate 20:14 114:9 cooperating 45:14 coordinated 121:8 coordination 74:13 137:20 cop 114:2 cops 115:9 135:22,23 core 118:16 corner 139:9 Council 18:6,24 19:12 72:7 77:15 82:23 109:4, 13,23 110:6 116:21 123:16 136:21,24 140:4 157:1,4,14,16 158:8,10 Councilman 28:20 75:8 99:13,17 100:15 136:8,10
---	--	---

138:19 141:15 156:11 Councilmember 8:3 9:8 19:11 28:18 29:12 40:8 42:8,9 44:10 47:17 52:1 75:6 100:18 109:4 124:19 138:23 141:7 155:21,24 156:3,6,10,17 councils 87:8 Councilwoman 4:11 8:5,8 9:7,11 19:24 22:17 23:12 25:12 27:12 28:6 31:22, 24 36:17 39:16 41:1 42:7, 10 46:8 47:16 49:8 51:18 52:24 59:14 63:14,20 64:10 72:12,18 74:4 75:2, 24 76:16 77:16 81:24 82:10 88:5 92:23 93:10 95:7 99:11,15 100:17,19 102:5,22 103:5,9,14 104:5 109:18,23 116:17 117:6 124:12 131:24 134:22 137:6 139:14 141:18,23 142:11,19 143:9 153:19 155:4,14,18 156:7,13,19 157:5,8,21, 24 158:17 counties 96:12 countless 109:9 country 8:15 35:22 64:19 county 56:19 96:14,15,17 150:19 couple 27:11 33:22 41:18 courage 80:21 100:23 court 57:2 58:2 84:22 98:16 99:20 106:21 130:13 146:11 Covenant 102:15 110:15 111:9 132:8,18 134:4 coverage 86:24 COVID 35:14,16 150:3,6 create 20:12 86:20 92:12	99:23 115:17 118:19 131:3 created 20:19 132:19 creating 98:11,19 creative 123:6 credit 139:1 crime 15:4 17:6 24:16,17, 18 59:3,13 60:12 99:8 107:21,23 112:4 117:15 126:9 139:10 crimes 21:15 29:16 43:14, 16 113:21,23,24 criminal 12:16 22:1 28:2 30:24 67:18,20 71:20 113:19 130:6 133:20 criminally 113:24 criminals 20:18 criminologists 41:18 crises 26:23 crisis 73:12 120:7 125:3 126:24 critical 19:19 72:21 105:23 critically 117:7 crucial 105:17 151:10 crucially 122:19 crush 12:5 culture 60:17 147:12 Cup 139:4 curious 39:17 40:6 current 46:13 48:1 78:12, 14 110:9 147:22 custody 14:2 67:23 customers 25:14 cycles 108:22 118:21 cylinders 138:13	D D.C. 64:15 DA 27:21 28:23 43:9 48:17 54:8 56:8,14 138:12 140:4 DA's 27:18,19 35:5 38:20 55:19 90:7 93:6 daily 68:2 dancer 152:17 danger 35:12,14 130:11 DAO 18:24 data 26:5 41:19 48:2 79:9 118:4 120:20 124:5 127:4 140:5,10 date 44:4 dates 84:22 day 7:15,22 47:1,3 49:1 89:14 92:15 102:11 103:18,20 104:21 105:6 106:8 111:17 116:8 145:3 days 10:11 17:17 45:19 113:1 DEA 44:20 deal 57:18 dealing 7:6 29:23 99:1 114:1 150:4 death 112:5 debilitating 145:16 decade 27:22 64:21 decades 21:10 33:22 37:20 decide 35:24 decided 94:16 decision 35:16,17 decision-making 33:13
---	---	---

decisions 27:2 33:17 36:8 decisively 124:1 decreases 108:16 112:2 dedicated 15:17 41:23 43:15 125:14 132:14 133:11 dedication 104:7 deemed 133:24 deep 41:22 deeply 19:13,14 70:15 154:10 defendant 13:7 defined 122:21 deliberation 33:18 delighted 10:24 18:2 19:21 29:13 delivered 105:7 demand 25:24 26:1,2 28:12 116:15 demoted 106:17 denied 106:20 130:18 deny 87:2 department 33:9,16 35:3 62:2,4 departments 16:10 depend 69:8 dependence 108:16 depending 92:21 deployed 90:11 deported 115:9 deprived 105:14 depth 86:9 deputized 78:7 deserve 72:8 87:6 115:22, 23,24	designation 69:12 Desmond 119:18 desperately 145:14 despicable 15:4 38:16 detailed 88:7 details 70:15 detained 67:17 detected 24:3 detective 146:4 149:16 150:22 determination 87:24 determines 85:17 developing 62:6 development 121:14 DHS 98:6 100:1 Diane 102:15 117:3,18 difference 45:10 46:4 90:13 difficult 5:17 13:19 15:15, 18 20:3 21:14 28:13 33:17 145:18 151:15 difficulties 113:18 dignity 72:9 79:15 87:22 106:1 115:23 diligence 121:23 direct 108:7 129:6 direction 94:17 96:24 128:17 directly 67:19 103:21 106:10 122:3 130:20 Director 102:14 110:15 Disabilities 70:21 disability 71:3 149:9 disadvantage 67:13 disagree 12:2	disappointed 57:13 disciplined 130:9 disclose 20:13 70:3 disclosure 70:5 86:19,23 discouraged 86:11 discriminated 31:10,18 discrimination 4:6,7 6:11 7:1 30:10 68:1,7 71:4,23 104:20 110:8 118:14 125:23 127:8 143:22 145:19,21 disempowering 147:8 dishonesty 129:16 disorder 98:24 disposal 58:24 disposition 48:2 disproportionately 68:12 71:6 127:13 disqualify 22:2 disrupt 120:15 123:11,24 disruption 6:8 distant 111:15 distributed 62:12 district 9:20,22 10:22 20:23 22:24 23:18 26:7 29:10 33:5 36:20 37:17 40:7 41:15 42:24 46:11 47:6 56:9 63:18 77:15 distrust 114:7 diversion 32:20 diversionary 39:1,10 100:2 diverted 32:19 division 17:12 78:5 DNA 44:6 documentation 107:10 129:4
---	---	---

dollar 53:3 dollars 54:15 56:6 120:11 135:10 domestic 5:13 8:21 107:19 door 60:14 71:18 111:1 downstream 30:7,14 dress 52:13,16 dressed 34:2 52:18 Driscoll 155:24 drive 154:2 drives 123:1 drop 34:15 Drop-in 105:10 drops 108:17 drug 35:11 53:5 79:5 114:1 135:7 due 69:15 107:8,11 113:2, 6,18 114:10 121:23 125:23 duly 157:7 dysregulation 80:2	economy 115:18 128:6 educate 62:24 educating 50:10 education 50:3 56:4 67:23 72:24 123:8 125:11 150:11 151:2 effect 57:19 effective 13:18 17:24 119:7 effectively 14:4 23:24 24:8,12 effort 31:17 efforts 109:24 elaborate 21:1 132:5 elevate 88:18 138:5 elevating 28:18 elevation 88:19 eliminate 125:8 embarking 137:10 138:18 emergency 108:17 emotional 127:1 emphasis 35:6 employed 129:24 employees 89:12 employer 69:24 73:1,14 83:17 85:5 86:21 106:18 employers 65:20 71:2 84:20 88:22 89:11 129:16 147:15 151:5 employment 4:7 6:7 20:11,21 65:11 67:22 68:11 84:16 85:14 86:10 101:1 105:22 106:4,11 107:9 108:3,12 110:8 111:19 112:7 113:17 117:11 118:16 127:23 128:21 129:3 131:15	empower 108:24 empowered 122:22 empowerment 64:24 encounter 135:24 encountered 20:16 65:5 88:15 encountering 91:14 end 52:22 76:23 77:10 128:3 155:8 ended 13:14,15 ending 104:7 endure 131:7 endured 80:19 106:14,16 enforcement 27:1 28:9 35:4 47:11 60:10 69:13 71:23 97:2 114:8 122:17 134:11,24 135:22 enforcing 63:2 engage 23:22 engagement 17:12 enormous 44:17 141:9 enrolled 105:2 ensure 69:24 70:12 71:2, 13 123:21 ensures 86:21 87:16,19, 21 131:13 ensuring 65:9 enticing 52:17 entire 43:13 entities 47:15 entitled 4:3 environment 20:13,19 59:16 145:6 158:24 environments 131:4 equally 7:6 equipping 123:10
E		
earlier 13:4 89:22 139:8 140:8 149:10 151:1 early 10:11 123:24 earn 112:14 earning 87:18 East 78:5 easy 30:3 echo 27:19 economic 64:23 65:6,21 68:4,19 72:9 85:21 86:1 87:10 108:6 127:2,9 economies 40:24		

equity 131:10 escape 22:5 24:1 105:18 115:16 145:10 escapes 6:3 escaping 72:4 essential 63:12 68:24 75:16 130:15 essentially 13:16 43:15 establishing 20:10 estimated 120:10 estimates 119:13 ethic 130:12 ethically 122:24 EU 121:21 event 75:20 149:24 events 12:12 120:6 136:12 139:3 eventually 71:1 everyday 7:3 evidence 129:18 evidence-based 64:23 exact 23:1 99:3 examples 106:24 excellent 49:1 141:7 exclusion 71:7 excuses 148:19 exercising 151:23 exist 40:19 115:13 exists 120:3 exiting 67:8 105:9 113:14 exotic 152:17 expand 50:13 71:1 expect 12:13 14:3 expectation 21:21 58:3	experience 5:8 65:3,17 83:12 84:4 86:13 88:2 108:8 118:5 120:24 122:20 128:24 154:3 experienced 16:1 experiences 20:14 experiencing 103:24 110:19 experiment 45:4 expert 43:5 46:18 96:5 expertise 41:23 102:3 experts 101:15 134:1 154:6 explain 6:7 46:19 80:17 145:23 explicit 20:11 exploit 30:5 85:22 99:10 112:11 115:14 120:4 exploitation 12:16 65:14 66:19 67:20 68:21 72:4 78:8 81:15 84:17 86:7 97:15 98:8 103:24 105:9 108:22 109:10 114:13 116:1 118:7 119:9 121:5 122:21 123:12,24 126:2 131:2 exploited 11:22 22:10 30:18 31:20 98:21 99:4 112:19 exploiter 16:14 106:3 exploiters 31:15 97:8 explore 47:23 expose 68:12 70:6 extent 25:2 external 17:11,19 extremely 15:14 22:7 24:18 146:16 150:8 151:3 eye-opening 154:1	F fabulous 136:19 face 4:24 67:14 80:6 84:13 114:12 127:20 130:23 faced 26:23 107:8 127:7 facing 65:18 117:8 129:22 154:9 fact 10:13 11:18 17:5 18:21 27:21 51:12 53:4 54:12 67:6 69:17 85:5 95:14 129:17 148:5 150:13 factors 85:16 failure 107:21 fair 4:4,23 5:3 8:23 72:8 87:3 fairly 70:4 fairness 71:15 115:23 faith 19:16 fake 92:12 144:22 fall 101:11 falling 119:22 false 114:2 familiar 61:16 80:10 families 17:15 66:21 family 10:17 11:4 14:19 15:10 17:17 27:17 90:5 97:23 98:2 fantastic 81:3 89:15 faster 108:14 favor 157:17 favorable 156:23 157:12 158:6 favours 114:16
--	--	--

FBI 44:18 78:7 146:5 149:17 fear 69:16 70:23 109:1 114:4 federal 46:10 57:2,3 58:2 59:16 61:20 federally 42:15 feds 58:8 feed 135:7 feel 77:6 79:11 144:8 145:10,14 147:18 153:1 feeling 143:17,18,21 144:9 felony 5:22 felt 145:8 147:14 150:8 153:3 Feminist 80:23 153:11 Feminists 144:12 Fewer 5:19 field 84:2 FIFA 139:4 140:24 fighting 85:2 figure 5:11 63:4 figuring 149:11 finally 6:3 70:16 130:22 financial 107:6 111:24 112:10,13,16 121:2 financially 148:21 find 28:14 52:7 53:1 83:17 85:8 92:9,10 94:8,19 95:3 119:21 123:23 150:17 finding 67:11 119:24 findings 66:17 fine 38:11 fingers 36:12 37:2 firearm- 43:15	Firearms 44:20 fired 106:17 firing 138:13 fit 9:2 flags 112:23 122:6 flares 80:8 flexibility 66:8 floor 28:16 flourishing 54:16 flow 23:3 27:23 flyers 41:5,7 FMLA 80:7 focus 8:18 59:2,4 62:8 89:23 focused 42:19 62:5 64:22 74:6,12 focusing 59:6 folks 9:1 18:9 30:9 137:14 follow 6:18 47:18 107:24 136:4 follow-up 57:14 58:3 142:2 force 19:1 35:15 43:10 47:4,9,23 49:19 78:9 113:20 129:6 forced 12:23 70:14 107:1, 16 112:13 119:14 129:9 131:6 forces 105:23 forcing 23:21 130:4 forefront 109:13 110:3 forensics 42:22 43:2,7,11 45:6 46:2 forgot 46:7 forgotten 150:2 formal 69:9,12	forms 18:19 125:8 forward 6:22 9:5 16:24 17:3 30:11 63:15 93:2 98:10 foster 61:4 90:24 100:2 126:16 127:14 fought 115:15 found 25:23 33:14 43:6,18 53:19 65:16 66:18 67:6 105:22 145:7 149:10 foundation 110:3 foundational 71:9 foundations 118:17 fraction 152:23 fragile 106:5 framework 71:11 72:3 frankly 34:19 57:13 59:12 fraud 129:6 free 118:21 147:20 150:21 freedom 112:17 115:24 frequent 41:5,7 94:11 frequently 65:17 friend 81:18 144:10 friends 63:8 frightening 28:7 front 23:13 47:21 53:14 126:23 frontline 121:4 fuel 101:4 full 45:7 67:10 134:9 139:1 full-on 45:6 fully 148:3 fundamentally 22:15 funding 62:13
--	--	--

funds 18:5 future 63:13 71:18 72:11 101:6 108:1 118:20 124:7 futures 87:10 G gain 107:6 112:13 gainful 65:10 gangs 101:16,20 gap 148:20 152:16 gaps 6:7 84:15 107:9 129:2,4 145:23 gave 88:6 genders 111:8 126:12 general 95:9 114:11 generally 46:14 generate 120:9 generations 119:4 geolocation 45:22 George 76:10 77:12,14 82:9 90:15 97:9 99:22 girls 13:10 14:22,24 20:5 give 26:15 46:16 47:24 49:13 58:7 59:11 76:20 102:4 135:10 138:2 139:1 giving 75:11 80:21 88:1 101:4 105:17 109:5 153:8 global 117:14,21 120:22 121:3 123:1 goal 137:24 good 4:17 9:23 11:21 27:14,15 28:14 31:13 33:18 46:17 49:24 64:7 82:13 102:23 103:3,15 109:22 124:15 government 69:14 78:13 79:16 93:20	grace 151:11 grad 82:21 granted 152:10 grateful 151:21 152:3 153:15,21 154:10 great 31:20 42:18 43:1 81:18 154:5 grocery 25:7 30:23 ground 136:13 137:22 grounded 87:22 grounds 28:15 group 78:1,2 80:22 110:11 120:22 groups 19:16 31:11 44:13 121:4 123:5 growing 68:15 126:13 grows 108:19 growth 108:9 guarantee 61:10 guess 28:17 32:2,4 33:13 35:18 37:24 guidance 69:24 71:1,21 guilty 45:1 gun 35:7 43:9 89:24 guys 89:11 153:7 H habit 135:8 hail 34:5 half 35:15 95:18 120:10 halfway 95:12 96:1 hand 4:14 22:19 24:20 112:14 hand- 50:22 handle 45:7	handling 16:2 happen 5:5 54:1 55:11,17 100:14 128:2 141:1 happening 5:24 28:1 32:11 56:6,7 101:18 119:9 124:2 137:22 140:12 happy 14:18 29:11 60:12 88:3 117:16 harassing 94:7 harassment 70:7 126:3 131:5 hard 6:1 29:15,17 106:8 115:15 145:2,22 149:3 harder 42:16 121:6 151:17 hardships 106:16 harm 5:24 53:19 106:14 114:13 harmful 130:23 harms 69:1 Harrisburg 116:8 haven 20:20 heal 105:18 108:24 150:17 healing 107:2 146:19 151:5 health 77:20 85:14,19 99:7 106:22 112:1 124:17 127:23,24 130:15 148:23 154:18 158:13 healthy 80:14 hear 6:24 20:3 32:16 53:15 64:8 72:13,14 77:7 82:7 94:2 103:11 115:6 154:1,5 heard 133:15 hearing 4:19 9:5 47:19 60:1 61:5 77:22 88:12
---	--	--

155:9 hearings 106:21 130:13 heinous 24:18 held 11:19 helpful 50:9 helping 75:16 101:4 146:5 helps 71:13 119:8,10 hesitate 69:4 hidden 126:9 hide 121:7 147:17 hides 79:10 high 35:6 higher 127:17 highlight 69:2 70:16 90:19 92:18 97:21 highlighting 8:19 56:3 101:24 Hill 116:8 hired 31:3 hiring 30:22 83:22 84:14 historic 34:15 historically 16:15 21:18 127:7 history 21:6 70:4 84:16 106:19 158:19 hit 53:7 135:11 150:3 hits 44:2 hitting 109:10 hold 36:23 119:3 holding 93:17 94:2 holistic 154:16 home 13:20 23:22 105:7 152:4 homelessness 99:1 110:19 112:3	homeowner 77:14 homes 68:15 homicide 15:12 17:16 45:18 homicides 34:16 35:1 honest 7:5 hope 7:4 17:6,20 153:6 hopes 19:4 hoping 150:16 Horace 13:8 horrific 13:24 horrors 24:13 hospital 80:9 113:10 hospitals 55:22 host 75:20 hosting 116:8 hotline 7:14,16,18,23 74:9 hourly 140:14 hours 13:17 105:3 106:17 house 13:13,14 24:13 56:22 62:1 102:15 110:15 111:9 132:18 134:4 House's 132:8 housing 6:8 67:23 71:19 84:19 85:18 97:12 105:1, 8 127:16,23 133:8 hub 44:18 120:23 huge 45:9 91:1 hugely 53:9 human 4:8,20 7:13,17 9:16 18:22,24 22:20 25:14 32:10 47:4 59:17 62:2 64:5 65:1,4 66:16 70:18 74:8,14 77:20 78:1, 7 84:2 86:15 90:20 95:15 103:22 104:8,17,22 109:16 110:1,10 111:12	112:8 113:3 117:22 118:13 120:11 124:6,17 125:17,21,23 126:1,6 127:19 128:1,7,19 131:22 132:4 133:24 137:1,10 149:24 158:13,21 hundreds 64:18 hunting 28:15 hypothetical 68:1 I ID 114:2 idea 11:21 31:21 39:7 identical 13:5 identification 129:12 identified 111:11 127:5 identify 49:15 74:21 101:10 111:6 119:8 127:12 133:2 135:1 illegal 40:14 illness 90:22 98:23 illuminating 20:2 immediately 42:3 immigrants 8:14 56:23 127:11 immune 80:2 impact 20:22 impacted 71:7 125:16 impacts 65:21 126:14 impetus 138:7 implementation 69:3 implemented 62:7 63:3 importance 18:15 79:13 90:18 important 8:17 10:3 12:11 22:7 40:9 56:5 57:5 58:13 70:17 72:21 74:4,17 77:2
--	---	--

83:3 86:17 88:10,14 89:10 132:12 151:3 importantly 108:18 138:4 imprisoned 23:24 147:19 improve 108:14 improvements 34:24 improves 111:24 in-hand 50:23 inappropriately 114:15 incarceration 24:8 inception 132:8 incident 14:7,9 incidents 5:14 includes 17:12 including 8:21 18:18 35:5 118:12 119:16 125:16 127:22 137:14 income 106:1 inconsistent 107:9 increase 18:4,13 increases 139:6 incredibly 10:3 12:11 13:18 45:4 83:13 89:10 independence 87:23 106:2 107:7 111:21,24 112:11,16 independent 118:20 indicators 111:4 122:9 132:20 134:17 indigenous 127:11 individual 36:23 37:12,14 38:14 individualized 105:4 individuals 15:8 52:13 66:22 99:24 119:3 126:6, 11,17	industries 144:24 inequalities 128:5,11 inequities 68:11 inflicted 131:16 inform 142:2 information 27:8 39:13 56:16,18 57:2,9,24 58:1,8 74:22 87:2 101:3 informed 86:6 93:4 150:20 infrastructure 120:19 140:1 141:13 initially 65:2 74:7 initiative 96:11,20 98:13 initiatives 62:14 injuries 113:7,11 injustice 128:11 injustices 128:4 insight 121:7 insignificant 54:11 inspired 144:9 inspiring 153:11 instability 65:22 108:23 instances 41:24 97:16,17 instill 114:5 Institute 81:14 institutions 121:3 instrumental 121:14 integration 112:2 intelligence 78:4 120:20 121:1 122:4 123:1,9 intelligence-led 118:3 122:14 intensive 105:2 interacting 55:8	interactions 6:9 interest 61:2,22 interested 57:16 122:13 international 119:12 121:16 internet 40:16,23 interpersonal 66:1 intersect 71:4 intersection 61:8 70:17 intersectionality 90:19 intersections 61:3 100:6 interview 6:19 intimate 90:6 introduce 158:20 introducing 8:9 77:18 104:16 112:7 124:20 investigated 48:14 investigation 41:10 45:24 investigations 20:15 34:23 49:7 130:7 investment 97:1 invite 116:3 122:12 invited 82:2 inviting 77:17 153:14 involved 53:5 54:17 82:4, 8 89:16 116:3 146:2 150:23 involvement 61:18 involving 27:5 irresponsibility 107:13 isolation 131:6 issue 8:18 11:1 13:5 19:14,19 20:16 29:24 40:9,21 42:19 54:11 69:23 85:14 88:20 108:4, 5,6,7 109:12 111:15
--	---	---

117:7,13,15 138:5,24 142:6 146:16 154:18 issues 11:6 18:21 21:9 29:22 44:9 61:23 65:22 66:1 84:12 132:16 148:23	9 juvenile 10:13 82:19 juveniles 10:10 14:13	L
J	K	lab 42:22 43:3,7,11 45:6 46:3 labeled 130:24 labor 11:15 12:18 14:15 16:7 107:16 111:7 119:13,14 lack 50:24 51:6,10 52:21 68:7 86:10 114:11 129:16 lacked 66:4 Landau 8:4,5 9:8 42:9,10 46:8 47:17 100:18,19 156:6,7 landing 113:18 landlord 97:17 Laquisha 102:17 124:14, 23 large 10:9 84:15 136:12 138:24 139:3 149:24 larger 48:22 largest 66:13 Larry 9:19 95:21 late 142:1 launch 18:24 42:21 law 26:24 28:9 35:4 47:11 60:10,18 69:13 97:1 114:7 122:17 134:10,24 135:22 lawmakers 75:17 lawsuits 54:12 lawyer 146:12 lawyers 146:20 lay 141:12 lead 5:22 47:3 83:24 131:4 leader 76:11,13 78:18
Jackie 144:10 Jacqueline 76:9 77:13 jail 14:9 January 116:9 Jaycee 80:24 Jazmeen 102:9 103:2,16 Jen 143:6,13 jeopardize 70:10 Jerianna 80:24 Jersey 132:19 141:2,4 job 6:14,19 22:3 30:16 65:24 87:2 94:19 114:18 119:7 145:23 148:20 152:16 jobs 65:18 67:3 108:1 129:13 john 26:12 27:5 38:2 45:13 50:23 51:21 52:3, 21 53:2 92:10 93:17 139:8 johns 25:19 32:3,4 38:14, 22 39:11,21 41:6 47:20 49:17 63:9 96:10,19 97:7 98:1 Johnson 116:22 joining 51:21 155:8 judged 114:19 judgment 143:23 145:19, 22 justice 5:18 10:13 23:9 62:5 81:22 131:11 147:4,	Karissa 76:11 81:1,10 82:15 88:12 Katrina 10:18,19 26:16 27:16 keeping 65:24 129:11 Kensington 78:6 98:14 105:10 136:1 Kenyatta 116:22 kidnapping 24:9 kill 115:7 killed 5:13 17:18 115:10 killer 21:16 killers 21:7 kind 20:20 29:13 30:20 32:3 41:9 42:1 43:6 63:11 75:19 89:4,12,16,20 90:1, 4,8,13 91:10,23 95:8 135:1 136:13,14 137:21 152:15 kinds 16:2 18:17 55:7 140:16 King 96:14 knew 148:13,17,23 150:24 knowing 50:15 154:7 knowledge 50:13 93:1 Krasner 9:20,23 10:23 20:24 23:1,19 26:8 29:11 33:6 37:18 40:8 41:16 43:1 46:12 56:10 63:19 78:10 89:20 95:21 96:13	

leaders 19:16 81:3 leadership 87:4 104:6 109:15 117:7 124:8 154:14 leading 72:1 learn 50:6 86:22 leave 96:1 114:22 115:5 leaves 84:9 leaving 13:15 66:24 led 47:1 68:4 Lee 11:3 left 10:6,16 legal 6:9 10:8 106:12 127:24 130:17 legally 43:22 legislate 93:5 legislation 8:10,11 29:4 71:19 79:13,22 80:15 88:3 89:13 107:17 116:13 121:12 123:16,20 124:21 125:20 126:4 legislative 93:14 121:12 122:2 legislators 75:17 legitimate 40:10 lengthy 24:6,7 letting 77:8 level 61:20 62:3,11,16 68:16 79:15 LGBTQ+ 8:16 127:12 liability 84:6 liable 12:14 license 43:23 44:2,4 life 5:1 7:4 14:5 22:4 25:5 56:13 73:3 85:2 87:6 94:17 113:15 145:13 148:10 150:7 151:13,14	lifesaving 105:13 130:16 lifestyle 30:1 lifetime 5:10 light 32:14 40:23 136:16 likelihood 112:3 limit 68:9 142:22 limited 107:10 129:3 149:19 150:1 lines 126:24 link 55:12 list 4:22 104:18 155:3 Listenbee 10:5 61:1,15 Listenbee's 10:8 literally 44:1 live 79:24 94:10 lived 83:11 84:3 86:13 118:5 120:23 122:20 128:24 154:3 livelihood 84:11 livelihoods 107:3 lives 41:24 72:5 87:22 103:23 106:6 123:19 127:21 128:20 living 66:20 87:18 126:16 127:14 152:6,7 local 7:14 62:16 115:18 locked 131:14 loitering 114:2 long 11:14 21:3,6 32:8,22 36:9 66:23 101:9 131:9 145:9 long- 68:22 long-term 66:15 69:6 87:13 108:6 111:20 118:17 141:14 longer 94:7	looked 57:17 lose 6:13 121:9 losing 65:18 loss 53:11 104:2 lot 31:4 36:8 40:15 62:20, 23 78:24 81:10 89:14,18, 22 95:13 96:7,8 97:15,22 98:22 135:24 141:24 144:19 152:11 love 15:20 23:8 54:19 102:2 115:22 137:3 loved 115:1 low 48:17 Lozada 31:23,24 36:17 39:16 41:1 42:8 44:10 93:10 95:7 155:17,18 156:17,19 Lozada's 52:1 luckily 150:18 151:19 lucrative 53:10 Lundstrom 64:4,7,12,14 72:16 74:2 lured 12:23 13:9 luring 52:17
M		
		machines 43:20 Madam 28:21 75:10 138:20 141:17 142:17 155:1 156:20 made 12:24 13:1 24:13 138:11 145:17 148:19 151:17 magnificent 34:20 main 116:11 mainstreamed 73:3 maintain 85:18

maintaining 108:11	means 69:4 113:9 128:9	mini 43:6,11
major 120:6	mechanism 63:1	minors 134:14
majority 69:15 127:4	media 44:7,11 45:11 63:5 86:24	minutes 49:2 142:23 144:17
make 4:16 8:3,18 12:20 26:17 28:12 30:2 31:9 33:11,16 35:11,24 43:3 44:14 45:9 46:3 53:24 54:18 55:2,15 61:7 75:17 85:4,11 88:23 90:12 94:6 95:24 99:4 101:5 117:12, 16 121:5 124:6 126:21 128:13,14 133:9 137:8 138:16 141:10 151:24 154:19	mediation 146:13	mischaracterize 57:21
makes 29:15,17 33:10 36:7 80:3 86:13 89:18 98:7 100:8 111:13 145:22	medical 85:19 106:21 130:14	misinterpret 84:21
making 27:1 44:24 54:3 61:9 91:4 96:23 97:4,10 99:19	Medicine 82:22	misinterpreted 65:20 129:15
man 13:22 93:24	meet 67:3 72:23	misread 128:24
management 105:3,4	meeting 47:10 48:19 116:4 155:10	misrepresent 57:11
Manager 102:10,17 103:17 124:24	meetings 47:10 49:2 50:5 61:24 62:1,4	missing 26:17 51:2,5
managers 133:17	Megan 64:4,13 76:4	mission 125:7
mandated 134:14,16	Melley 117:4,18 138:22	misunderstanding 51:11
manner 154:17	Mellie 102:15	misunderstood 84:24
manpower 92:15	member 17:17 102:16	mitigate 137:1
marginalized 21:5 126:18	members 19:12 82:15 87:11 117:10 124:16	mix 46:20
marketplace 40:11 136:15	mental 85:19 90:22 98:23 106:22 112:1 127:24 130:14 148:22	mode 145:8 146:18 153:6
mask 145:2	mentally 145:24	model 118:4 120:16 121:19
massive 139:6	mention 48:13	models 96:22
matter 43:4 46:18 96:5	mentioned 48:17 96:13 128:12 132:5 137:13 139:22 151:1	modern 43:7 45:6 72:2 121:15
matters 7:3 82:6 86:3 107:17	mentor 81:17	mom 81:11
meals 105:12	message 31:5,6 49:23 104:11	moment 119:6
Meaning 88:23 134:9	messaging 137:18	moments 35:8 120:7
meaningful 65:9 111:18 136:18	met 71:15 133:5	momentum 141:10
	mic 75:11 103:6	money 18:10 37:23 112:14 140:19
	midyear 19:4	monitoring 130:3
	millions 44:1 54:14	monolith 83:4
	mind 24:6	Montgomery 150:19
		months 140:14
		morning 13:4 27:15 144:21
		motels 54:14

mother 107:5 mother's 152:6 motion 156:17 157:18 158:4 motivated 85:8 Mount 132:22 move 6:22 74:10 98:10 123:23 139:11,22 141:3 156:21,24 157:13 moved 40:3 41:12 129:9 157:9 moving 140:19,20 multi-billion 53:3 multiple 53:24 67:3 137:13 municipal 16:10 murderers 58:18 murders 58:18	needed 43:13 66:7 90:14 92:6 needless 13:11 negligible 57:14 neighborhood 123:7 neighborhoods 94:10 neighbors 83:5 nerd 79:10 news 46:17 NGOS 122:18 nice 68:20 88:8 night 110:22 144:21 nights 105:8 Nina 8:9 104:5 124:19 Nonfatal 15:13 nonprofit 78:14 normal 112:20 note 142:22 156:14 notes 144:1,2 147:11 Noting 9:14 nowadays 92:9 NSS 66:11,16 67:12 number 7:13 11:9 23:2 48:23 49:14 59:9 135:9 numbers 48:16 49:22 133:10 numerous 107:8	obtain 52:19 106:11 occupied 56:23 occur 19:2 28:15 occurred 14:11 56:13 occurring 34:11 56:19,20 offer 86:8 offering 6:10 37:22 52:14 93:22 143:5 offers 123:17 office 27:18 35:5 38:21 41:3,8 47:6 54:20 57:3 78:15 89:2 90:8 93:6 Office's 43:9 officer 34:1 37:21 52:18, 23 134:8 officers 52:12 officials 93:21 olds 134:19 Olympics 140:11 on-the-street 41:13 one-time 55:3,14 ongoing 74:12 84:19 114:6 130:5 132:15 online 39:24 41:14 92:12 120:7 136:2 open 43:21,23 60:13 open-air 136:14 opening 4:13 46:1 opens 71:18 operate 120:3,21 operates 39:2 126:10 operating 43:8 119:16 operation 74:8 opinion 158:2 opportunities 6:14 25:6 50:7,12
N		
names 46:21 80:23 naming 82:5 83:16 Natalie 102:14 110:4 132:3 nation 62:13 national 7:13,17 62:3 64:16 65:14 66:10 74:8 96:18,19 nationally 5:7 72:1 natural 8:24 nature 57:15 100:10 113:3 navigate 6:2 navigating 84:21 130:5 nearby 11:2 necessarily 52:11,21 necessity 26:24	note 142:22 156:14 notes 144:1,2 147:11 Noting 9:14 nowadays 92:9 NSS 66:11,16 67:12 number 7:13 11:9 23:2 48:23 49:14 59:9 135:9 numbers 48:16 49:22 133:10 numerous 107:8	
O		
	O'ROURKE 28:19,20 75:7,8 99:13,17 100:15 136:9,10 138:19 141:7,15 156:10,11 Obama 10:14 obligations 7:7	

opportunity 9:24 12:15
17:1 18:3 31:12 40:18
68:7 71:16,24 82:16 88:1
115:16 153:8

opposed 157:22

order 24:2 25:24 49:11,21
54:16 94:4

orders 130:6

ordinance 4:4,23 8:23
65:8 70:11 71:17 72:7

organization 64:17
117:21 119:13 125:4

organizations 121:5
123:7 126:21 133:18
139:16

organized 117:15 139:9

outcome 23:15 25:20

outcomes 17:5 66:15
108:13

oversight 97:11 100:4,12

overtime 114:17

owning 144:13

P

p.m. 116:7 158:24

pace 88:8

pain 80:2 154:11

painfully 111:13

pandemic 35:9

panel 4:12 9:13 49:9
63:24 64:2 76:8 78:23
88:17 89:22 92:1 102:8
141:21 142:9

panels 142:16,18

Paris 140:11

part 8:20 10:9 19:3 21:13
34:20 37:9 43:9 83:9 87:6
115:18 123:12 144:11

145:17

participants 114:4

participate 12:8 30:4,12
47:7

participating 49:19 53:18

participation 67:10 83:20

partner 48:10,19 90:6
122:3

partners 27:1 28:9 35:4
46:10 50:3 54:22 60:10,
11 105:20 134:12 137:13

partnership 46:24 47:14

parts 140:2

pass 72:7 81:20 123:20
153:7

passed 116:13

Passing 87:15

passion 65:1

passionate 147:11

past 54:13 78:12 91:7
94:24 114:20 138:6,9
152:20

paths 104:10

pathway 73:14

pathways 71:20 74:14

patrol 91:16

pattern 55:5

pay 21:23

paying 54:24

peace 150:17

peer 86:5

peer-based 90:9

Penn 82:21

Pennsylvania 5:11 110:16
111:10 133:23 134:5

Pennsylvania's 77:24

Pennsylvanians 110:10

people 6:13 11:18 12:4,
17,21 14:24 16:17,22
17:22 21:4,5,7 22:9,13
23:9 24:11,21 25:15 26:3
28:14 29:16,17,20 30:4,
13 38:10 39:9 45:17
51:22 53:17,24 59:2,20
60:5 61:2,11 62:20,24
63:4 68:5 73:16 75:18,21
80:16 81:4 82:7 85:11
86:6 88:13 89:21 91:14
92:13 94:14 95:2,17,23
97:16,22 98:16,20,23
99:4,9 100:5 101:2,5,11,
19 110:18,23 111:16
112:12 118:23 119:10,20
120:14 122:19 126:15
127:6,10,11,12,14 128:13
133:23 135:2,17,24
139:11 140:19 154:4

Perfect 103:10

performance 66:3

period 20:6 22:12

periods 84:17

peripheral 59:5

permanent 22:1

permission 27:9

permit 157:2,14 158:9

perpetrated 15:6,7

perpetrator 146:3,7

perpetrators 147:20,23

persist 67:2 68:8

persistent 128:4

person 15:3 30:23 32:14,
16 34:3 36:16,22 37:4,7,
22 45:14 53:7 56:15,24
60:15 81:5 93:22 94:7,23
115:11 135:6,18 143:5

person's 106:10

persona 92:12 personal 70:15 107:21 112:16 129:11 perspective 86:3 pertains 49:5 pervasive 126:9 phases 92:20 Philadelphia 4:3 9:15,21 11:20 34:21 35:3 38:2,20 43:8 49:23 53:12,16 65:11 69:23 71:12,24 75:19 82:20 86:4 87:15 89:5 95:11 98:5 102:18 104:8,23 109:17 110:4, 13,21 116:5 122:12 123:2 125:1,3,5 126:13,22 128:18 129:14 130:18 131:8 139:2 140:18 158:19 Philadelphia's 123:21 Philadelphians 123:10 Philly 46:3 80:23 144:11 153:10 phone 21:20 45:12,13 92:9 phones 43:21,22 130:3 physical 5:9 113:7 127:1 physically 146:1 physiological 127:2 pick 21:19 91:23,24 picked 20:5 33:2 piece 56:1 pike 60:21 pimp 16:13 92:10 93:17 94:22 pimped 97:16 pimps 97:7 pioneered 118:2	place 26:3 55:7 68:14,22 75:20 119:11 124:2 129:9 136:1 149:22 places 11:20 31:4 39:6 94:9,11 101:24 102:2 plain 126:10 plan 74:11 143:15 planning 144:7 plans 74:18 plate 43:24 44:4 plates 44:2 platform 41:14 players 52:8 plea 45:1 plucked 101:12 poignant 92:1 point 17:21 27:11 30:17 37:2 52:1 74:16 90:14 138:11 146:12 152:18 154:15 pointing 36:12 points 72:22 Polaris 64:5,15 74:5 139:20 Polaris' 66:11 police 13:19 16:5,10 21:20 33:9,15,16 34:1,21 35:3,10,15 37:21 39:1,10 40:19 51:22 54:5,23 89:1 93:6 133:22 140:3 150:22 police's 55:18 policies 55:7 62:11,12 63:2 policing 35:23 policy 38:20 61:22 76:10, 12 84:1 87:8 116:2 154:3 political 100:10 127:8	poor 107:14 130:11 population 71:5 131:20 populations 71:6 126:15 posed 37:21 position 11:19 113:18 117:13 positive 39:4 152:1 possibility 118:19 possibly 14:17 149:8 potentially 19:7 133:2 poverty 67:10 68:6,16 126:16 127:14 power 108:9 112:17 115:20 121:9 124:6 148:1 power-based 99:9 powerful 66:17 104:11 PPD 78:4 practice 15:15 84:4 practices 4:4,23 8:23 122:6 preceding 22:22 precision 46:16 predictors 111:20 premature 112:4 present 124:18 155:15,19 156:8,12,15 President 10:15 116:21 press 13:3 116:10 pressure 153:2 pretty 34:19 59:12 80:4 prevalence 40:24 prevent 85:23 113:11 118:6 120:14 124:1 preventative 122:13 prevented 129:10
---	--	--

preventing 68:21 117:22 128:7	102:10,13,14 103:17 105:7 110:15 134:8	protection 7:3 14:21,23 20:11 70:1 79:15 106:12 108:3 117:11 123:18 126:5 130:17
prevention 110:2 125:11 137:12	programs 64:24 110:24 125:11	protections 4:5,6 6:10 9:4 68:18,24 69:8 70:13 71:10,19 86:11 101:1 112:7 118:19,24
prevents 80:16 125:21	progress 44:17 96:23	protective 85:15
previous 42:17 78:20,22	projects 96:9	protects 8:11,13 32:20
previously 78:3	promoting 50:21	proud 77:14 102:14 109:22 110:5 132:7
preying 39:24	promotion 87:3	prove 45:18 55:13,14
price 34:7	promotions 114:17	provide 6:21 7:12 63:1 122:4 144:24 145:11 153:3
prided 131:9	proper 100:4	provided 57:1,9,24 58:2 62:13 105:5 110:17 139:17
prior 14:7,9 35:9 37:20 56:13	properly 97:11 132:11 157:9	providing 37:5 51:23,24 74:22 94:1 95:17 125:14 140:17
priorities 59:7	properly-trained 46:2	PTSD 80:1 148:22
prioritize 27:3 36:2	proposed 123:16	public 15:7 22:12 31:14 59:19 60:3,4 77:20 78:15 85:13 86:24 93:20 99:7 108:5 114:11 124:17 137:24 138:2 142:21 143:2,5 148:24 154:17,23 155:2,9,10 158:13
priority 54:3,18,21 55:16, 18,19,21 59:8,9	prosecute 11:22 17:1 20:17 23:3 24:22 29:7 38:22 47:20 49:16 60:12 95:22	publicly 79:21 83:15
private 119:15	prosecuted 21:23 22:21 23:15 32:7 62:10	pull 143:24
privilege 151:21,23	prosecuting 25:21 50:23 95:15	pulling 119:20
privileged 152:9,12	prosecution 24:5 26:14 28:4 29:5 30:8 32:22 38:10,12 58:4,5	punished 65:12 106:13 109:1 129:1 130:19
problem 16:21 30:17 95:24 103:10 128:9 141:14 147:6 149:18	prosecutions 23:16 33:12 49:7 53:17	punishment 71:16
problematic 80:11 131:1	prosecutorial 97:3	punitive 66:6
problems 84:24	prostitution 25:10 31:1,2 32:9 50:21 51:20 114:1	purpose 15:2 26:14
proceed 49:21 77:9,11 109:20	protect 10:10 12:4 14:16 31:8 86:1 94:5 95:2,5 104:14 116:13 118:11 120:13 122:11 141:10	pursuing 86:12
process 69:14 73:2 82:5 83:22 84:15 146:11	protected 4:22 12:21 30:10 86:16 104:18 110:7 147:14,24	
product 25:19	protecting 37:12 109:16 124:9	
productive 94:21 151:24		
professional 108:8		
profit 120:5		
profitable 121:6		
profound 104:1 127:1		
profoundly 6:1		
program 32:20 39:2,4,11		

push 39:22 68:5 pushed 65:19 put 23:5 30:22 32:24 37:23 92:13 100:5 145:2 putting 50:11 98:15 144:22 Q qualified 86:14 qualify 70:19 149:8 quality 18:16 question 22:18 25:13 33:7 36:14 37:1 41:2 43:1 46:6 93:8 99:12 132:3 141:6 questionable 79:8 questioned 33:2 questions 10:2 19:22 20:9 39:15 42:3,12 72:22 75:5, 9 76:2 78:23,24 88:4 117:1,17 132:24 134:6 136:7 141:21,24 142:9 Quetcy 31:23 quick 42:11 61:13 111:3 132:20 134:16 quickly 73:24 120:8 132:6 148:11 quorum 156:15 R radically 40:11 raise 40:9 112:23 raised 44:9 range 128:3 rape 14:10 51:9 62:23 125:2 raped 13:22 20:6 55:4	rapes 5:21 rapist 21:17 rarely 32:15 145:14 rates 140:14 re-exploitation 85:24 108:15 111:23 118:22 reach 63:5 read 88:7 readers 43:24 reading 157:2,15 158:9 ready 144:8 real 5:1 19:7 24:17 27:23 30:17 44:14 82:7 84:13 124:7 129:22 154:3 realistically 26:20 realities 129:14 reality 33:8 68:2 70:5 83:14 85:1 106:8 147:23 realm 50:8 51:17 realtime 137:23 reason 21:13 31:16 32:18 36:4 58:7 132:12 reasons 33:18 57:10,12 59:22 69:4,5 123:14 rebuild 5:3 85:2 123:19 128:20 145:13 150:7 151:13 rebuilding 72:5 103:23 127:21 151:14 receive 69:12 150:20 received 18:13 105:12 receiving 147:9 recent 54:13 82:20 recognition 18:15 recognize 69:17 122:9 123:11 149:2,4	recognized 87:20 recognizes 106:7 156:16 recognizing 4:13 86:15 139:2 recommendation 49:10, 20 99:19 156:24 157:12 158:7 record 9:15 22:1 25:11 31:1 41:9 49:3 67:20 71:20 156:14 records 67:18 107:10 113:19 129:11 recovery 84:23 105:24 108:5,13 111:21 118:17 130:21 recruit 120:9 recruitment 122:5 red 112:23 122:6 redo 77:4 reduce 25:24 26:2 28:11 reduced 40:21 106:18 reduces 111:22 referral 48:20 50:19 74:13 referrals 50:18 referred 16:4 28:5 48:15, 24 50:16 134:7 reflect 84:17 reflects 79:14 refuse 38:21 refused 133:1 regain 65:6 121:10 region 117:9 139:12 140:20 141:4 registering 44:3 regular 80:8 rehabilitate 29:18
--	--	--

rehabilitated 25:4 rehabilitation 22:8 related 13:5 43:16 79:7 relates 93:16 Relations 9:16 relationships 47:13 relevant 83:12 reliable 85:7 relief 71:20 Relocations 17:13 remain 14:3 19:14 67:8 remarks 4:14,16 8:7 117:12,16 139:22 remember 27:3 34:14 35:9 38:1 73:6 reminded 119:19 136:12 reminds 101:13 remove 7:8 87:12 removing 108:20 reorganizing 34:22 replicated 121:20 report 21:14 29:16 69:15 122:1 134:16 reported 5:21 48:20 156:22 157:11 158:5 reporting 134:14 representatives 52:15 represented 105:21 representing 56:15 57:1 request 18:23 19:4 70:12 77:6 158:7 requesting 37:8,15 require 54:22 69:21 86:19 requirements 121:24 requiring 88:21	rescued 13:20 20:8 research 65:15 68:4 96:8 134:20 residential 110:24 residents 131:21 resilience 87:19 129:18 resilient 85:7 118:20 124:3 resources 49:14 74:24 105:13 149:9,19 150:1, 10,12 151:16 respect 79:16 responded 66:5 responding 39:20,21 response 9:10 123:22 141:22 142:10 155:22 156:1,4 157:23 responsibilities 114:18 responsible 56:2 rest 14:4 55:12 76:7 restraining 130:6 restraint 24:10 result 57:6 80:8 107:15 128:3 129:6 resulted 24:5 retaliation 65:18 70:7,23 retraumatize 73:19 retraumatized 146:24 reveal 70:14 120:21 review 28:3 reviewed 82:3 Rhodes 81:13 rights 70:22 71:11 74:24 104:14 118:9,11 119:5 125:12 ripe 97:14 99:4,8 101:11,	16 rise 60:3 risk 92:13 108:15 111:23 112:24 117:24 122:1 123:11 127:18 riskier 121:6 risks 69:3 122:5 risky 70:6 river 119:20 road 59:21 145:6 Robert 10:5 robust 12:15 role 78:12,14 153:12 roles 78:13,20 83:11 86:12 91:7,8 roll 155:12 rollout 70:11 room 152:6,7 root 118:7 rooted 130:10 Rotunda 116:11 routine 11:18 106:1 routines 112:21 Rue 8:4 rules 157:1,13 158:8 runaway 110:20 runaways 91:1 126:17 runs 96:17,18 S sacrificing 87:9 sadly 11:18 14:11 safe 12:22 20:20 75:18,22 85:18 97:6 105:8 127:23
---	---	--

safeguard 119:2 safeguarding 84:11 117:23 118:9 119:7 122:7 safely 106:3 122:23 safer 20:12 124:3 safety 22:8,12 61:10 65:22 68:23 69:16 70:10 78:16 84:19 87:14 93:20 104:10 107:2 108:5 110:17 111:21 129:22 130:21 132:16 145:12 sake 52:16 Salvation 7:15,21 82:23 102:11 103:18 104:4 109:7 savings 67:5 scale 7:5 128:8 scared 143:17 144:13 148:15 scary 145:22 scenario 136:3 schedules 130:2 school 25:8 112:22 screen 132:4,11,13 screened 111:2 screeener 111:5 screening 89:16 111:3 135:2 searching 83:10 seated 10:5,15 Seattle 39:6 96:14 Seattle's 96:16 second- 35:17 seconded 157:7,10 Section 121:15 security 72:10 145:12	seek 13:16 63:6,7,8,10 seeking 65:10 113:17 sees 104:12 self- 87:23 self-determination 112:18 self-sufficiency 108:19 selfish 112:12 Semiquincentennial 139:5 send 49:23 134:19 sends 104:11 Senior 102:17 124:24 sense 5:19 89:18 95:24 145:11 sentence 24:7 sentencing 13:7 sentiment 27:19 separate 16:7 106:3 135:17 serial 21:6,16 series 55:10 serve 19:18 82:22 87:7 109:9 110:14 111:10 124:23 served 14:8 64:17 78:3 104:22 109:7 service 29:2 37:5,8,16 51:23 93:22 94:1 145:1 serviced 132:9 services 11:4 17:14,20 32:17 52:4,14,20 62:2 77:21 84:2 94:23 95:18 102:13 103:20 105:16 124:17 125:10 128:1 130:16 132:14 133:11 150:19 158:13	services' 55:20 serving 125:4 152:13 session 142:21 157:3,16 158:10 set 121:16 settle 146:13 settled 54:13 severe 126:2 sex 11:16 12:17 14:15 23:22 32:10 36:19,21 37:22 38:5 82:17 93:16 94:15 111:6 sexual 5:9,20 8:22 10:17 11:5 14:19 15:11 27:17 34:8 55:9 79:19 81:15 90:3 95:18 102:19 107:20 113:7 114:16 125:2,8,13, 15 131:22 148:12 shade 23:7 26:21 shadows 39:23 147:18 Sham 9:12 63:23 76:6 102:7 142:15 143:1 154:22 155:11 shame 131:7 shamed 114:20 146:22 148:19 shape 87:8 122:22 share 58:12,14 75:13,15 83:2 88:1 shared 95:21 122:23 sharing 93:11 100:22 154:11 Shea 81:13 82:1 shelter 110:17 shifts 130:4 shingles 80:5 shooters 58:19,20
--	--	---

shooting 15:13 44:13 79:3 shootings 34:15,23 shoplift 135:9 shoplifter 135:13 shoplifting 135:5,7 short 20:6,24 37:18 44:16 show 94:24 showers 105:11 showing 30:24 79:17 shown 81:4 147:22 shows 7:1 127:4 sick 143:21 side 94:3 97:2,3 116:15 sight 126:10 significant 87:13 signify 157:18 signs 85:1 129:5 similar 62:17 90:2,8,10 101:21 135:14 simple 6:16 69:16 simply 12:9 23:5 30:21 51:9 86:21 131:7 Sinai 132:22 single 45:19 107:5 111:17 145:3 sister 13:23 sisters 80:20 sit 83:24 situated 36:16 situation 19:7 30:19 57:4, 8 67:1 95:3,4 148:3 149:13 150:5 152:5 situations 33:1 110:20 skilled 16:1	Slavery 121:15 sleep 110:23 144:21 sleeping 152:5 smart 36:8 smile 144:23 social 44:7,11 45:11 55:20 63:5 97:10 98:4 127:9 society 128:5 soft 135:13 sold 139:12 solicitation 41:14 solution 123:13 solutions 122:22 154:19 solve 16:20 solving 44:22 son 115:7 sort 34:8 43:16 44:5 45:2, 23 49:3 52:17 57:14 59:5 137:17,23 sound 54:20 sources 39:13 space 96:7 115:17 spaces 40:4 74:23 120:8 span 83:7 speak 29:3 36:3 47:2 79:12 83:24 91:8 99:18 134:2,8 142:16 147:16 148:16 153:9,12 speaker 142:23 143:2 speakers 155:2,6 speaking 78:19 81:8 91:11 143:16,19 144:1,7 147:7 special 86:20 specialists 86:5	specialized 91:5 125:9 specifically 61:6 126:5 132:23 spending 115:20 spent 10:9 96:6 spite 154:11 spoke 28:22 89:22 spoken 147:13 sporting 120:6 spot-on 138:23 spread 149:20 spreading 50:9 51:15 squeeze 142:24 stability 65:6 68:10,19 72:9 86:2 87:14 104:10 108:2,7 stabilize 108:14 stabilizing 105:23 stable 85:14 118:15 127:22 131:15 staff 41:19 86:6 92:15 133:18 staffed 46:2 stage 73:1 136:17 stakeholders 19:17 stakes 68:17 stalking 5:10 stand 144:14 147:16 153:13 stands 128:22 131:10 start 12:9 43:2 54:24 56:3 73:2 103:2 135:2 139:24 started 36:19 80:6 150:15 starting 41:10 73:11 92:2 140:18 141:8 starts 119:6
--	---	--

state 27:13 46:10,13 76:18 82:11 102:24 119:7,17 143:10 states 16:16 21:11 66:13 121:21 127:6 statewide 42:14 status 4:9,21 86:16 104:18 125:24 126:7 stay 7:4 85:20 113:9 144:2 stays 80:9 steady 16:11 Steering 83:1 stenographer 103:11 step 65:9 71:9,14 96:2 97:4 108:20 118:15 128:16 153:11 steps 136:23 stereotypes 130:23 stigma 70:7 80:11 84:13 131:7 143:22 145:19 146:14 148:13 stigmatized 87:20 stings 92:4 stop 7:15,22 31:17 58:17, 19 59:3 62:7 102:11,16 103:19 109:11 117:19,20 118:2,8 119:10,19 120:2, 16 121:13 122:16 123:3, 14 141:13 147:7 store 25:7 30:23 stories 80:18 100:22 122:23 124:6 story 45:23 73:18 75:23 93:12 133:13 152:23 storytelling 123:8 strangler 21:17 strategic 36:9 74:11 122:4 123:22	strategically 120:9 strategy 69:7 stream 16:11 streamline 77:5 street 34:4 39:20,22 40:4, 20 97:8 135:23 streets 152:8 strengthen 29:5 69:6 strengthening 74:12 122:10 strengthens 87:5 112:1 strip 112:15 strong 44:24 61:22 62:18 81:17 98:4 118:18 stronger 121:23 strongest 85:15 111:19 strongly 123:15 structural 67:13 84:14 structure 98:3 struggled 144:19 struggling 107:6 127:15 145:24 148:9,21 stuck 145:8 146:17 study 42:5 66:11,14 67:6 134:20 stuff 40:15 59:5 92:4 subcategory 9:1 subject 43:4 46:18 50:14 96:5 subjected 126:2 submit 73:8 submitted 9:17 18:22 19:3 substance 90:22 97:13 98:24 112:4 substitutes 154:7	success 59:4 successful 36:9 39:5 suffering 120:12 suggestions 137:5 summarize 73:24 Super 149:21,23 Supervisor 27:16 supervisors 66:2,3 supply 26:1 119:14 121:18 122:5 support 9:18 18:3 19:5,18 24:23 31:7 62:14 65:7 66:8 69:22 88:2 93:15 98:4 110:18 117:10 124:22 125:14,19 130:7 133:10 151:12 supported 108:11 121:11 supporting 17:10 66:21 68:22 104:9 112:9 supports 72:3 111:23 123:15 Suppression 96:10,19 surface 135:12 surprised 59:20 surrounded 41:20 surrounds 148:14 survey 66:12 surveyed 67:16 survival 82:23 129:19 145:8 146:18 153:5 survived 11:23 surviving 6:17 131:8 survivor 45:15 64:6 65:3 66:10 68:10 69:7 71:10 76:11,12 78:18 79:18,23 80:20 81:3 82:18 83:16 86:22 87:4,16 88:16 89:17 91:9 96:6 107:5
--	--	---

108:24 111:12 115:5 133:6,7 143:17 144:3,18 148:12 149:5,6 survivor's 105:24 survivor- 68:3 survivor-centered 71:22 118:3 survivors 5:2,17 6:2,24 17:10 49:13 64:19,24 65:10,17 66:7,12,15,19 67:2,8,13,15,24 69:11 70:2,6,12,18 71:13 72:3, 8,23 74:14,19 79:17 81:23 83:4,23 84:5,9,13 85:6,16 86:1,8 87:5,14,21 91:15 95:16 97:6 103:21 104:9,12,22,24 105:8,11, 17 106:4,13,15,24 107:24 108:10,21 109:7,8,17 110:7 111:6,22 112:8,9 113:16 114:12,19 115:13, 17,22 116:14 118:12,15 121:10 123:18 124:22 125:15 127:19 128:18 129:2,8,20 130:8,12,17, 22 131:14,21 132:9 133:12,16 145:13 146:15, 17 147:5,7,14 148:14 151:4,8,11 152:11 153:24 suspended 157:2,14 158:9 suspicion 66:6 sustain 106:11 SVU 48:12,19 91:12 system 6:1,9 29:15 61:12, 17 97:13 98:4,20 100:3, 10,13 101:16 108:17 115:14 135:14 systemic 68:10 71:7 systems 97:11 98:6,11,21 99:23 100:4 101:10 128:10 140:9 147:24	T table 76:15 102:21 143:8 tables 84:1 tackle 99:6 takes 118:7 140:5,6 154:14 taking 104:13 136:24 talk 28:8 30:2 48:11 50:3 60:19 73:16,22 98:15 136:5 142:7 146:8 talked 25:17 59:18 88:17 talking 24:9,10,11 78:10 90:24 92:3 93:2 98:2 target 120:6 targeted 21:5 targeting 21:7 task 19:1 43:10 47:4,9,23 49:19 78:9 taught 81:9,10 team 15:23 16:1 41:19 45:11 77:17 88:24 technological 120:18 technology 92:16 118:5 140:6 telling 87:17 133:12 152:22 tells 53:16 54:15 tempted 145:5 tended 33:24 tens 139:11 tentacles 53:20 term 10:14 38:3 68:23 terminated 130:9 termination 131:5 terms 4:10 20:21 24:15	29:6 34:21,24 40:12 61:17 terrible 17:6 59:13 terrified 143:18,20,21 terrifying 144:6 testified 153:23 testify 7:10 25:2 41:21 60:15 77:18 82:2,17 testifying 29:1 38:5 64:3 83:15 testimony 9:17 20:2 25:1 60:22 63:17,22 72:20 75:14 76:19,23 77:1,2 82:12 88:7 102:6 103:1 109:21 116:19 117:1 124:13 132:2 136:11 140:9 142:13 143:11 154:21,23 text 45:16 69:20 thanking 77:16 theory 116:1 therapy 84:22 150:14,21 thin 149:20 thing 34:9 42:21 43:17 44:5 45:2 50:2,4,8 55:15 97:18 111:13 things 12:24 24:14 29:8 45:22 50:16 51:5 55:11 60:20 88:11 90:20,23 91:19,22 92:1 94:18 100:14 114:21 140:16 142:3 thinking 37:11 57:22 60:7 91:22 135:20 Thomas 155:21 thought 11:21 133:21 thoughtful 36:10 77:2 thoughts 19:23 73:10,21
--	--	--

thousands 64:18 139:11	topic 10:3 65:2	61:4,19,23 62:7,21 64:5
threatened 114:24	tortured 115:2	65:1,4 66:16,24 68:9,13
threats 129:22	touch 76:5	69:10 70:3,19 74:9,15,20
thrive 98:8 100:8	touched 114:15	78:1,8 79:3,5 82:18 86:15
throw 23:7 26:21	tough 33:1	90:4,20 92:7,19 93:16
throwing 36:12	toxic 131:3	95:16 100:8 101:12
Thursday 116:6	track 41:11 144:3	102:12,13 103:19,20,22
tied 6:11 67:19 130:20	tracks 141:12	104:8,17,23 105:19
time 7:10 11:14 18:7 20:7	trade 26:4 54:15 114:16	106:9,19 107:7,18 109:16
26:9,12 27:4 32:8,11,22	tradition 21:3	110:1,6,11,20 111:4,7,12,
33:3,14,24 35:13 44:5	traditional 5:19 30:8	14 112:8 113:4 116:6,15
62:15 66:14 73:11 80:12	Traffic 102:16 120:22	117:23 118:13 122:10
81:21 96:7 106:20 109:5	traffick 30:13 117:19,20	125:17,19,22,24 126:1,6,
130:12,18 131:18 132:17	118:2,8 120:2,17 121:13	8 127:3,5,18,20 128:1,8,
133:14 142:1,22 145:9	123:3,15	14,19 129:2 131:23
146:9 149:7,21 153:16	trafficked 11:24 15:2	132:4,10,21 133:4,24
158:18	16:18 21:8 24:15,21	134:15,17 137:2,11
times 35:20,23 50:17 51:4	25:16 32:15 34:3 37:24	144:18 147:12 148:5
62:22 145:4,9	38:11 53:8 56:24 63:7,8	149:24 151:7 158:21
tiny 76:21	82:19 97:22 99:5 101:2,6	trained 91:6,13
tired 143:16,18,21	105:15 129:24 135:6	training 50:6 51:14 88:13,
Tobacco 44:19	153:4	20,21,24 89:1,9,15 90:8,
today 6:23 7:10 10:4 11:7	trafficker 16:6,14 23:21	18 91:17 92:18 135:3
41:22 75:15 77:18,22	52:6 56:17 113:8 115:10	trainings 92:5
78:16 79:14 82:17 83:15	135:8 145:7	trans 14:24
87:12 91:9 100:24 105:21	traffickers 17:2 22:21	transition 142:20
109:6 119:3 123:17	25:17 38:16 49:16 53:21	transparency 121:17
124:18 125:18 136:11,21	58:15,16,17 59:10 63:11	trap 118:22
140:3 143:16 151:22	85:22 98:1 107:12	trapped 67:9 108:22
153:7,14 155:8 158:14	112:11,15,22 113:20	trauma 65:21 70:15 71:3
Today's 4:19	114:5 120:3,21 121:9	80:3 84:8,22 114:6
told 146:19 147:4 150:21	130:1 134:3	127:16 131:15 149:2
tolerate 15:5	traffickers' 113:22	150:14
toll 127:2	trafficking 4:8,21 5:4 6:4,	trauma- 86:5
tool 29:7 44:22 111:3	18 7:2,14,16,18,22 8:15	trauma-informed 66:4
132:19	11:14,16 12:17,18 14:13,	trauma-related 79:24
tools 58:24 62:6 105:17	15 16:8 18:19,22 19:1	traumas 132:15
138:3	23:23 25:15 32:10 45:15	traumatized 13:24
	47:4 48:23 50:19 51:13,	traumatizing 77:3
	16 56:16,18 58:23 59:17	treat 36:19 154:17

treated 70:4 treating 120:1 treatment 22:9 85:20 87:3 97:14 125:10 130:14 treatments 106:23 tremendous 46:4 trial 15:15 45:2 146:21 147:2 trillion 120:10 true 40:13 trustee 117:20 truth 87:18 143:19 144:13 147:19 turn 120:23 turning 16:19 Tutu 119:19 type 32:19 41:13 99:8 types 100:14 typically 132:16 U U.S. 42:18 57:3 121:21 ugly 11:12 UK 121:15 ultimately 97:5 unable 113:6 unacceptable 54:1,2 unbelievable 6:5 uncomfortable 28:13 underlying 128:10 underscores 68:17 understaffed 35:21 understaffing 35:22 understand 17:21 26:22 33:3 71:2 73:17 83:3 86:7	151:6 154:13 understanding 51:6,11,15 66:5 86:9 99:21 114:12 137:21 understood 80:19 unethical 114:18 unexpectedly 113:2 unhireable 85:5 unhoused 126:18 unique 67:12 123:4 uniquely 86:14 unit 10:18 11:5 14:20 15:11,13,16 16:7 17:13, 14 43:19 89:4 90:7,10 United 16:16 21:11 66:13 127:6 units 91:5 University 132:22 unlawful 4:5 24:10 unreliability 84:18 129:5 unsolvable 44:23 unstable 84:19 127:16 131:1 unwavering 104:7 update 47:24 updates 48:10 49:5 50:6 upheld 119:1 upside 16:19 upstream 119:21,23 123:23 urge 72:6 81:19 109:11 110:5 123:19 125:18 131:17 USA 117:20 usual 16:9 58:1	V vaccination 35:13 vacuum 5:5 128:2 validated 111:2 132:21 134:21 valuable 83:13 values 71:11 84:3 131:13 variety 21:8 43:14 vast 69:14 92:24 127:4 vernacular 16:13 25:19 versa 141:5 vice 52:15 92:6 141:4 Vice-chair 155:16 victim 4:9,21 11:3,17 17:13,19 22:14 55:9 69:10 73:12 83:11 86:16 92:11 94:5 104:17 113:5 125:24 126:7 148:4 150:18 victimization 6:12 69:18 106:9 107:19 victimize 16:22 victimized 16:23 22:11 29:21 31:19 92:22 120:15 127:13 133:3 victims 8:21 11:11 12:3 17:10,16 18:18 20:13 22:13 31:8 62:9 64:18 91:15 93:15 95:23 112:13,20 113:1,21,23 114:6,8 118:12 119:11 120:13 125:12,19,21,24 127:3,5 143:24 145:21 147:16 148:17 video 45:21 view 148:7 viewed 84:5
--	--	---

vigorous 61:9	138:16	work 6:21 13:19 15:20,22 17:11,23 18:1,16 19:8 20:17 25:6,9 29:2 30:20 32:10 33:10 36:19 37:13, 15 38:5 42:1,5,23 65:19 67:2 80:11 82:21 83:10 93:5 94:9,15 101:9,13 103:21 104:15 105:19 107:11 110:11 112:21 113:1,6,12 119:23 121:2 122:2,15 126:23 128:17, 23 129:3,10,21 130:11,13 131:3 134:12 139:19 140:4,23 144:22,23 150:16 153:1,2
vigorously 23:4 44:12 58:22	warrant 43:23	worked 61:21 96:8 106:15 107:4 144:23
Villanova 81:14	warrior 81:12	worker 36:21 118:11,18
violence 5:6,9,14 7:5 8:22 15:11 27:17 35:7 43:10 55:10 79:4,19 89:24 90:3, 5,6 102:19 104:1 107:15, 20 113:14 125:2,9,15	Washington 64:15 96:14	workers 85:8 140:15 141:3
violent 10:17 11:4 14:19 113:2	watched 34:14	workers' 118:9 119:5
virtually 64:3	ways 25:3,22 29:14	workforce 65:15 67:11 71:14 86:2 115:19 122:11
visibility 83:19	wealth 148:2	working 17:7,18 18:21 19:15 48:3 63:16 78:1,2, 14 89:13 112:10 140:12 148:9,20 149:15 152:21
visible 41:13 113:10	weight 6:5	workplace 61:6 65:12 68:17 70:8 104:19 108:4 114:14 125:22 126:4 129:1 130:24 148:24
vital 118:10,14,18,23 123:17 151:4	welfare 61:12,17	works 17:15
voice 84:10 148:16	well- 46:1	workspace 73:20
voices 87:7	well-being 151:4	world 117:8 136:17 139:4, 10,21 152:2
voluntarily 30:20	well-positioned 19:5	worldwide 122:18
vote 60:5 76:22 77:10 131:17	Wellness 98:16 99:20	worth 56:7 119:17 135:10 147:1
voters 60:5	Wenk 76:11 82:13,15 89:8 95:6,10	worthy 38:17
vulnerabilities 85:21 99:2,3 100:7 135:19	West 56:21	wrapped 133:20
vulnerability 68:6 120:5	Wharton 82:21	writing 73:22
vulnerable 21:4 75:13 99:24 101:10 118:23 124:10 126:15 128:13 131:20,21	White 62:1	
	who've 16:22 81:4 101:8	
	witnessed 108:9	
	witnesses 30:12 41:21 64:2 76:7,14 102:20 143:7 155:7	
	WOAR 55:2 125:1,13	
	WOAR's 125:7	
	woman 34:1 93:24 140:8	
	women 5:7,8,13 8:12 15:1 23:21 32:23 144:10	
	wondered 20:18 26:5	
	Wonderful 64:13	
	wondering 134:23	
	word 50:9,11 51:16 60:7 61:13 158:20	
	words 10:1 27:11 29:13 50:24 52:22	
W		
W-A-D-A-S 10:19		
Wadas 10:18,21 26:16 27:10,14,16 46:22 48:8 50:1 52:10		
walk 147:20		
wanted 61:13 75:11 79:1 81:16 91:18 100:20 115:8		

written 9:17

wrong 11:12 31:5

wrote 62:10 144:16

Y

y'all 136:21

year 5:12 12:13 18:23
 19:2,8 34:16,17,18 48:5
 60:21 66:21 67:9 75:21
 104:21 109:8 119:18
 137:3 140:21 150:14

years 14:9 17:22 18:7,9
 22:23 33:21 34:17 38:24
 64:20 65:16 67:7 69:18
 74:7 89:24 118:1 125:6
 146:2 148:6,15

yield 28:16

young 14:13,24 20:5
 32:23 61:2,11 62:20,23
 63:4 93:23,24 110:18
 111:16 140:8

younger 39:24

youth 111:1,4,10 123:5
 126:16 132:20 134:17