

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NJ COALITION AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING
Report by Virginia Lyttle, AAUW-NJ Representative

On June 14, 2018, the annual meeting of the NJ Coalition Against Human Trafficking was held at the Human Rights Institute at Kean University in Union, NJ. It should be noted that AAUW-NJ hosted the first state-wide meeting on human trafficking in 2007 at Brookdale Community College. Since that time, AAUW has made human trafficking one of its policy issues.

At least 60,000 persons are trafficked in the US each year, eighty percent of whom are US citizens. Ninety percent are victims of sex trafficking; ten percent are victims of labor trafficking. The average cost per slave is \$90. In New Jersey victims between the ages of 10 and 75 have been identified.

According to statistics, human trafficking is one of the most lucrative crimes, along with drugs and gun sales. New Jersey is a transportation hub. It has a network of roads, railroads, ports and an airport. It is a tourism draw because of its beaches, Atlantic City and its proximity to New York and Philadelphia. This makes New Jersey an attractive place through which to transport and sell human trafficking victims. Because of the work of the Coalition, New Jersey has been recognized as having one of the most comprehensive laws to prosecute human traffickers and to protect and provide services to survivors.

The NJ Coalition was established in 2011 with approximately 30 groups represented. This included faith-based organizations, non-profits and other advocates dedicated to eliminating modern day slavery. Today the Coalition, a 501(c)(3) organization, has over 150 diverse groups. Its membership now includes government agencies, law enforcement and direct service providers who come together with the mission of ending human trafficking in our state, country, and world-wide. The Coalition's mission works to accomplish this through education, advocacy and assistance to survivors.

The number of calls and tips have increased every year, showing that awareness of human trafficking is growing. To quote Fredrick Douglass: "I expose slavery in this country because to expose it is to kill it." This year, 42,000 cases were referred to the Hotline, 10,000 to law enforcement. New Jersey had 292 of these cases. We also had 30 contacts from victims themselves.

Grim as these statistics are, the Coalition has reported successes in its efforts to combat trafficking. Through our three Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (SOAP) projects this year, we have been able to rescue at least one minor each time. Through the National Hotline and our cooperation with Polaris, 417 calls have been registered from New Jersey. That is in the top 15% of calls. Through tips from citizens who recognized the possible signs of trafficking, 133 calls were tracked. A total of 161 minor victims' cases have been investigated.

It is the mission of the Coalition and AAUW's participation as a member, to make the public aware of human trafficking, to recognize the signs, to educate our youth, and to assist the victims to heal, recover and resume life as free citizens. If you see something, say something. The National Hotline is 888-373-7888, or contact your local law enforcement agency.

The Coalition operates on a volunteer basis through its Board of Directors and its volunteer committees. The committees include: Arts, Education, Healthcare, Legislative, SOAP and Slave Free Commerce. For more information and/or to become a volunteer, visit our website at www.njhumantrafficking.org.