



2023 REPORT

# MISSISSIPPI

## Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking

*State Action. National Change.*

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IN 2011, SHARED HOPE RELEASED THE NATION'S FIRST LEGAL FRAMEWORK THAT CHALLENGED states to enact laws that comprehensively address the crime of child sex trafficking. When we launched the Protected Innocence Challenge project—and issued the inaugural State Report Cards—the majority of states received an “F” grade, reflecting the reality that many states’ laws failed to even recognize the crime of child sex trafficking. Since then, we have been working to lay the foundation for transformational policy, practice, and cultural change by supporting state legislators and stakeholders in identifying gaps in the fabric of laws needed to address this heinous crime. By 2019, no state received an “F” grade, and a majority of the country received an “A” or “B.”

## PROTECTED INNOCENCE CHALLENGE

### MISSISSIPPI

2019	SCORE	GRADE	10	24.5	15	7.5	21.5	12.5
	91	A	10	25	15	10	27.5	15
2011	SCORE	GRADE	5	16	13.5	6	14	7.5
	62	D	10	25	15	10	27.5	15

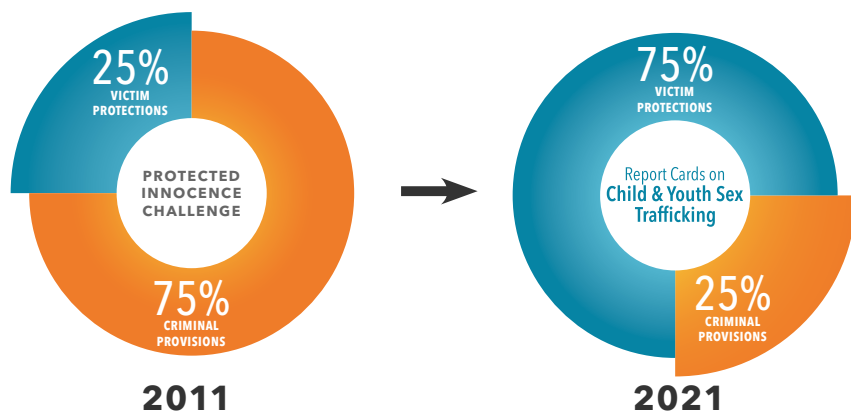
From 2011 to 2019, Mississippi raised their grade under the Protected Innocence Challenge from a “D” to an “A,” enacting legislation aimed at holding offenders accountable and protecting survivors.

To view Mississippi’s 2019 PIC report, visit [sharedhope.org/PICframe9/reportcards/PIC\\_RC\\_2019\\_MS.pdf](https://sharedhope.org/PICframe9/reportcards/PIC_RC_2019_MS.pdf)

## A SHIFT IN FOCUS

THE PROTECTED INNOCENCE CHALLENGE PROJECT WAS SHARED HOPE’S VISION FOR MOBILIZING collective state action to ensure national change. Building on the progress already made under that project—while preserving its most fundamental components—we released a new, advanced legislative framework in 2020 that

focuses on new policy priorities reflective of feedback and research collected from the field. This framework is meant to challenge states to take the next step in the fight against sex trafficking by focusing on the area of law where the largest gaps remain—victim protections.



## ADVANCED LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

### 6 ISSUE AREAS IDENTIFIED:

CRIMINAL  
PROVISIONS

IDENTIFICATION OF &  
RESPONSE TO VICTIMS

CONTINUUM  
OF CARE

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR  
TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS

TOOLS FOR A VICTIM-CENTERED  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE

PREVENTION  
& TRAINING

### 40 POLICY GOALS ANALYZED:

### 110 TOTAL POINTS AWARDED:

States earn up to 2.5  
points per policy goal

Extra credit: Protections  
for labor and youth 18+

100 possible points

plus up to 10 points

### FINAL LETTER GRADES ASSIGNED:

**A** | 90-110 **B** | 80-89 **C** | 70-79 **D** | 60-69 **F** | <60

#### TIER RANKING

Another way the Report Cards on Child & Youth Sex Trafficking will measure progress is through a Tier system that will help states understand how they are doing compared to other states. Especially at this stage where grades are clustered at lower levels, the Tiers help to show states where they are on a spectrum. This provides another way for states to evaluate the progress they make beyond changes to their letter grade.

#### THE TIERS ARE STRUCTURED AS FOLLOWS:

- ▶ TIER 1 = TOP 10 SCORES
- ▶ TIER 2 = MIDDLE 31 SCORES
- ▶ TIER 3 = BOTTOM 10 SCORES

D



# MISSISSIPPI

## 2023 Report Card

TIER I

**GRADES ARE BASED SOLELY ON AN ANALYSIS OF STATE STATUTES.** While we recognize the critical importance of non-legislative responses to propel progress, grading on statutory law provides a clear mechanism for evaluating policy goals across all states while ensuring that survivor-centered reforms are an enduring part of states' responses.

### STATE HIGHLIGHTS:

- Between 2021-2023, raised score by .5 points.
- Currently ranked 10th in the nation (tie).
- \$2,500,000 was appropriated from state funds to support the provision of specialized, community-based services to survivors of sex and labor trafficking.
- One of only 8 states to require a specialized multi-disciplinary response to cases of child sex trafficking.
- Requires child welfare and law enforcement to receive training on identification and responses to child sex trafficking.

### SAFE HARBOR STATUS:

One of 30 states that statutorily prohibit the criminalization of minors for prostitution; extends the Safe Harbor provisions to provide immunity for child sex trafficking victims accused of promoting prostitution or engaging in sex trafficking conduct as a result of their own victimization.

Issue		Grade	Score	Summary
	1. Criminal Provisions	A	$\frac{16}{17.5}$	Policy goals accomplished related to buyer and trafficker accountability under state CSEC laws, mistake of age defenses, decoy defenses, business entity liability under the trafficking law, and financial penalties. Gap remains related to buyer accountability under the trafficking law.
	2. Identification of and Response to Victims	F	$\frac{14}{27.5}$	Policy goals accomplished related to third party control, non-criminalization for prostitution and sex trafficking offenses, and child abuse definitions. Gaps remain related to foreign national victims, screening through child welfare and the juvenile justice system, expanded non-criminalization, juvenile court jurisdiction, and non-caregiver trafficking cases.
	3. Continuum of Care	D	$\frac{9}{15}$	Policy goals accomplished related to MDT responses and appropriations. Gaps remain related to community-based services, services through child welfare and the juvenile justice system, and extended foster care services.
	4. Access to Justice for Trafficking Survivors	F	$\frac{8.5}{15}$	Policy goal accomplished related to civil remedies. Gaps remain related to civil orders of protection, crime victims' compensation, vacatur, restitution, and statutes of limitation.
	5. Tools for a Victim-Centered Criminal Justice Response	B	$\frac{8}{10}$	Policy goals accomplished related to victim-witness supports and privileged communications. Gaps remain related to hearsay exceptions and alternatives to live, in-court testimony.
	6. Prevention and Training	F	$\frac{5}{15}$	Policy goals accomplished related to training for child welfare and law enforcement. Gaps remain related to training for juvenile justice agencies, prosecutors, and school personnel as well as prevention education in schools.
EXTRA CREDIT	Youth		3	Protections related to appropriations, civil remedies, and privileged communications are extended to sex trafficked youth.
	Child Labor Trafficking		5	Protections related to financial penalties, child abuse definitions, MDT responses, appropriations, civil remedies, and privileged communications are extended to child labor trafficking victims.

**OVERALL GRADE**  
TIER I

**D 68.5**

## WHAT IS SAFE HARBOR?

“Safe Harbor” refers to laws that insulate survivors from a punitive response and direct them toward funded, comprehensive, and protective services.










## WHY SAFE HARBOR?

These laws ensure survivors of child and youth sex trafficking are not involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system and receive trauma-informed care. Appropriate identification and access to services are vital to creating a just response for survivors of child and youth sex trafficking.

## SAFE HARBOR LAWS

Comprehensive Safe Harbor laws  
**SHOULD PROHIBIT  
ARRESTING, DETAINING,  
CHARGING, & PROSECUTING**  
all minors for prostitution offenses, regardless of  
whether a finding of trafficking victimization is  
made, and, instead, require law enforcement to  
direct child and youth survivors to  
**SPECIALIZED SERVICES & CARE.**

Safe Harbor laws  
**SHOULD ALSO PROHIBIT  
CRIMINALIZATION**  
of child sex trafficking survivors for other crimes  
committed as a result of their victimization.

Status	Safe Harbor Policy Goal
 Fully met	The definition of child sex trafficking victim in the criminal code includes all commercially sexually exploited children without requiring third party control (see Policy Goal 2.1 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 2.1</a> for background).
 Not met	State law mandates child welfare agencies to conduct trauma-informed CSEC screening for children at risk of sex trafficking (see Policy Goal 2.3 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 2.3</a> for background).
 Not met	State law mandates juvenile justice agencies to conduct trauma-informed CSEC screening of children at risk of sex trafficking (see Policy Goal 2.4 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 2.4</a> for background).
 Fully met	State law prohibits the criminalization of minors under 18 for prostitution offenses and establishes a services-referral protocol as an alternative to arrest (see Policy Goal 2.5 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 2.5</a> for background).
 Not met	State law prohibits the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for status offenses, and misdemeanor and non-violent felony offenses committed as a result of their trafficking victimization (see Policy Goal 2.6 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 2.6</a> for background).
 Fully met	State law prohibits the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation offenses, including accomplice and co-conspirator liability, committed as a result of their trafficking victimization (see Policy Goal 2.7 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 2.7</a> for background).
 Not met	State law provides child sex trafficking victims with an affirmative defense to violent felonies committed as a result of their trafficking victimization (see Policy Goal 2.8 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 2.8</a> for background).
 Not met	State law mandates a process for coordinating access to specialized services for child sex trafficking victims that does not require involvement in child-serving systems (see Policy Goal 3.1 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 3.1</a> for background).
 Fully met	State funding is appropriated to support specialized services and a continuum of care for sex trafficked children regardless of system involvement (see Policy Goal 3.6 for further analysis and <a href="#">Issue Brief 3.6</a> for background).

## STATE SUMMARY:

Mississippi prohibits the criminalization of all minors for prostitution offenses and extends non-criminalization protections to sex trafficking and promoting prostitution offenses, a progressive step toward a survivor-centered, anti-child sex trafficking response. Further, the state legislature made appropriations during the 2023 legislative session to support coordination of, and access to, community-based services for child and youth survivors of sex trafficking. However, state law does not mandate a process for connecting sex trafficked children with community-based services, potentially leaving some survivors underserved or disconnected from resources that are necessary to address trauma and promote healing.

**SAFE HARBOR RESOURCES:** For additional information, visit [reportcards.sharedhope.org/safeharbor/](https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/safeharbor/).

**SAFE HARBOR MAP:** To see our map of state Safe Harbor law development, visit [reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SafeHarborMapDec2022.pdf](https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SafeHarborMapDec2022.pdf).



This report provides a thorough analysis of Mississippi's statutes related to offender accountability and victim protections while providing recommendations for addressing gaps in those statutes.<sup>1</sup> This report does not analyze case law, agency rules, or regulations, nor does it analyze practices or initiatives that exist outside of statutory law. However, stakeholders were invited to share non-statutory responses to paint a fuller picture of the state's anti-child sex trafficking response; where such responses were submitted, they are included as "Insights from the Field" under the respective policy goal but are not factored into the state's grade.

For more information on how to use this Analysis Report, click [here](#).



## ISSUE 1: Criminal Provisions

### Policy Goal 1.1

The child sex trafficking law is expressly applicable to buyers of commercial sex with any minor under 18.

● **PARTIALLY MET**

Mississippi's trafficking law could apply to buyers of commercial sex with minors based on the term "causes."<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(1)(c) (Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty) states,

A person who knowingly subjects, or attempts to subject, or who recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides or obtains by any means, or attempts to recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide or obtain by any means, a minor, knowing that the minor will engage in commercial sexual activity,<sup>3</sup> sexually explicit performance, or the production of sexually oriented material, or causes or attempts to cause a minor to engage in commercial sexual activity, sexually explicit performance, or the production of sexually oriented material, shall be guilty of procuring sexual servitude of a minor and shall be punished by commitment to the custody of the Department of Corrections for not less than twenty (20) years nor more than life in prison, or by a fine of not less than Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00) nor more than Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00), or both . . . .

However, to ensure buyers are held accountable as sex trafficking offenders, the trafficking law should be amended to expressly apply to persons who "patronize" a minor for commercial sex.

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluations of state laws are based on legislation enacted as of July 1, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Following federal precedent, "obtains" can also be a buyer-applicable term. However, the definition of "obtains" under Mississippi's Human Trafficking Act is specific to labor trafficking cases. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(l) (Human trafficking act; definitions).

<sup>3</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(e) defines "commercial sexual activity" as "any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to, promised to, or received by any person."

- 1.1.1 Recommendation: Amend Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(1)(c) (Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty) to clarify that buyer conduct is included as a violation of Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(1)(c). (See [Issue Brief 1.1](#).)

**Policy Goal 1.2** Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) laws<sup>4</sup> specifically criminalize purchasing or soliciting commercial sex with any minor under 18.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi law criminalizes both purchasing and soliciting commercial sex with a minor. Specifically, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51(1)(a) (Prostitution; misdemeanor procuring services of prostitute; felony promoting prostitution; penalties)<sup>5</sup> states,

A person commits the [crime] of procuring the services of a prostitute if the person knowingly or intentionally pays, or offers or agrees to pay, money or other property to another person for having engaged in, or on the understanding that the other person will engage in, sexual intercourse or sexual conduct with the person or with any other person. “Sexual conduct” includes cunnilingus, fellatio, masturbation of another, anal intercourse or the causing of penetration to any extent and with any object or body part of the genital or anal opening of another.

**Policy Goal 1.3** Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) laws<sup>6</sup> apply to traffickers and protect all minors under 18.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi’s CSEC laws address an array of trafficker conduct. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51(2)(a) (Prostitution; misdemeanor procuring services of prostitute; felony promoting prostitution; penalties),<sup>7</sup>

A person commits the felony of promoting prostitution if the person:

- (i) Knowingly or intentionally entices, compels, causes, induces, persuades, or encourages by promise, threat, violence, or by scheme or device, another person to become a prostitute, engage in conduct in violation of Section 97-29-49 [Prostitution; report to Department of Child Protection Services for suspected child sexual abuse or neglect if minor involved; immunity from prosecution if trafficked person involved], regardless of whether the other person can be or is arrested for, charged with or convicted of the offense of prostitution;
- (ii) Knowingly or intentionally solicits or offers or agrees to solicit, or receives or gives, or agrees to receive or give any money or thing of value for soliciting, or attempting to solicit, another person for the purpose of prostitution;

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase “commercial sexual exploitation of children” (or “CSEC”) encompasses a variety of criminal offenses committed against a child in which the child engages, or agrees to engage, in a sex act in exchange for something of value either directly or through a third party. Appropriately crafted CSEC laws can be important, additional tools available in a prosecution of child sex trafficking conduct by supplementing available penalties under the trafficking law and providing additional options for plea negotiations without requiring prosecutors to rely on unrelated or low-level offenses in that context. For this reason, we analyze trafficking laws separately from CSEC laws—even though both involve commercial sexual exploitation. For a complete list of Mississippi’s CSEC laws, see the appendix located at the end of this report.

<sup>5</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51 provides for a heightened penalty when the victim is a minor. See the appendix at the end of this report for the relevant penalties.

<sup>6</sup> See *supra* note 4 for a full discussion on the purpose of analyzing trafficking laws separately from CSEC laws throughout this report.

<sup>7</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51 provides for a heightened penalty when the victim is a minor. See the appendix at the end of this report for the relevant penalties.

- (iii) Knowingly induces, persuades, or encourages a person to come into or leave this state for the purpose of prostitution;
- (iv) Having control over the use of a place or vehicle, knowingly or intentionally permits another person to use the place or vehicle for prostitution;
- (v) Accepts, receives, levies or appropriates money or other property of value from a prostitute, without lawful consideration, with knowledge or reasonable cause to know it was earned, in whole or in part, from prostitution; or
- (vi) Conducts, directs, takes, or transports, or offers or agrees to take or transport, or aids or assists in transporting, any person to any vehicle, conveyance, place, structure, or building, or to any other person with knowledge or reasonable cause to know that the purpose of such directing, taking or transporting is prostitution.

Further, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-5-5 (Enticing a child under 14; punishment) applies to those who “maliciously, willfully, or fraudulently lead, take, carry away, decoy or entice away, any child under the age of fourteen (14) years, with intent to detain or conceal such child from its parents, guardian, or other person having lawful charge of such child, or for the purpose of prostitution . . . .”

**Policy Goal 1.4** Mistake of age is not an available defense in child sex trafficking prosecutions.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi law prohibits a mistake of age defense in prosecutions for child sex trafficking.<sup>8</sup> Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(1)(c) (Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty), “It is not a defense in a prosecution under this section . . . that the defendant reasonably believed that the minor was eighteen (18) years of age or older.”

**Policy Goal 1.5** Use of a law enforcement decoy is not an available defense in child sex trafficking cases.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi’s Human Trafficking Act expressly prohibits a defense to prosecution based on the use of a law enforcement decoy posing as a minor. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.5 (Human trafficking act; use of undercover operative in detection of offense permitted) states, “The fact that an undercover operative or law enforcement officer was involved in any manner in the detection and investigation of an offense under this act shall not constitute a defense to a prosecution under this act.”

**Policy Goal 1.6** Business entities can be held criminally liable for conduct that violates the trafficking law.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi’s trafficking chapter expressly allows for business entity liability and establishes a business-specific penalty scheme. Specifically, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(3) (Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty) provides,

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<sup>8</sup> Further, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51(2)(c) (Prostitution; misdemeanor procuring services of prostitute; felony promoting prostitution; penalties) prohibits the defense for “promoting prostitution” offenses, stating in part, “There is no requirement that the defendant have actual knowledge of the age of the person . . . .” However, the buyer-applicable subsection, which applies to “procuring the services of a prostitute,” does not contain a similar prohibition. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51(1)(c).



An enterprise<sup>9</sup> may be prosecuted for an offense under this chapter if:

- (a) An agent of the enterprise knowingly engages in conduct that constitutes an offense under this chapter while acting within the scope of employment and for the benefit of the entity.
- (b) An employee of the enterprise engages in conduct that constitutes an offense under this chapter and the commission of the offense was part of a pattern of illegal activity for the benefit of the enterprise, which an agent of the enterprise either knew was occurring or recklessly disregarded, and the agent failed to take effective action to stop the illegal activity.
- (c) It is an affirmative defense to a prosecution of an enterprise that the enterprise had in place adequate procedures, including an effective complaint procedure, designed to prevent persons associated with the enterprise from engaging in the unlawful conduct and to promptly correct any violations of this chapter.
- (d) The court may consider the severity of the enterprise's offense and order penalties, including: (i) a fine of not more than One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00); (ii) disgorgement of profit; and (iii) debarment from government contracts. Additionally, the court may order any of the relief provided in Section 97-3-54.7 [Human trafficking act; forfeiture of assets and disposition of proceeds].

Further, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(1)–(3) (Human trafficking act; injunctive and other relief for victims of trafficking; confidentiality) states,

- (1) Any circuit court may, after making due provision for the rights of trafficked persons, enjoin violations of the provisions of this act by issuing appropriate orders and judgments, including, but not limited to:
  - (a) Ordering any defendant to divest himself of any interest in any enterprise, including real property.
  - (b) Imposing reasonable restrictions upon the future activities or investments of any defendant, including, but not limited to, prohibiting any defendant from engaging in the same type of endeavor as the enterprise in which he was engaged in violation of the provisions of this act.
  - (c) Ordering the dissolution or reorganization of any enterprise.
  - (d) Ordering the suspension or revocation of a license or permit granted to any enterprise by any agency of the state.
  - (e) Ordering the forfeiture of the charter of a corporation organized under the laws of the state, or the revocation of a certificate authorizing a foreign corporation to conduct business within the state, upon finding that the board of directors or a managerial agent acting on behalf of the corporation in conducting the affairs of the corporation, has authorized or engaged in conduct in violation of this chapter and that, for the prevention of future criminal activity, the public interest requires the charter of the corporation forfeited and the corporation dissolved or the certificate revoked.
- ....
- (3) Any person who is injured by reason of any violation of the provisions of this chapter shall have a cause of action against any person or enterprise convicted of engaging in activity in violation of this chapter for threefold the actual damages sustained and, when appropriate, punitive damages. The person shall also recover attorney's fees in the trial and appellate courts and reasonable costs of investigation and litigation.

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<sup>9</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(f) (Human trafficking act; definitions) defines “enterprise” as follows:

[A]ny individual, sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, union or other legal entity, or any association or group of individuals associated in fact regardless of whether a legal entity has been formed pursuant to any state, federal or territorial law. It includes illicit as well as licit enterprises and governmental as well as other entities.

## Policy Goal 1.7

State law mandates that financial penalties are levied on sex trafficking and CSEC offenders and are directed to a victim services fund.

### ● FULLY MET

Mississippi law levies financial penalties on sex trafficking and CSEC offenders and directs those financial penalties into a victim services fund. Specifically, under Miss. Code Ann. § 99-19-75(2) (Assessment on certain offenses to be deposited in Mississippi Children's Trust Fund or Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund), offenders must pay a \$1,000 assessment, which is to be deposited into the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund. Miss. Code Ann. § 99-19-75(2) states,

In addition to any monetary penalties and any other penalties imposed by law, there shall be imposed and collected from each person upon whom a court imposes a fine or other penalty for any violation of Section . . . 97-3-54.1 [Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty], . . . 97-5-1 et seq., [which includes Miss. Code Ann. § 97-5-5 (Enticing a child under 14; punishment),] or 97-29-51 [Prostitution; misdemeanor procuring services of prostitute; felony promoting prostitution; penalties] an assessment of One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00) to be deposited into the "Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund" created in Section 97-3-54.11.

Further trafficking offenders face asset forfeiture under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.7(1)(a) (Forfeiture of assets and disposition of proceeds); it provides,

In addition to any other civil or criminal penalties provided by law, any property used in the commission of a violation of [the Mississippi Human Trafficking Act] shall be forfeited as provided herein.

(a) The following property shall be subject to forfeiture if used or intended for use as an instrumentality in or used in furtherance of a violation of this act:

(i) Conveyances, including aircraft, vehicles or vessels;

(ii) Books, records, telecommunication equipment, or computers;

(iii) Money or weapons;

(iv) Everything of value furnished, or intended to be furnished, in exchange for an act in violation and all proceeds traceable to the exchange;

(v) Negotiable instruments and securities;

(vi) Any property, real or personal, directly or indirectly acquired or received in a violation or as an inducement to violate;

(vii) Any property traceable to proceeds from a violation; and

(viii) Any real property, including any right, title and interest in the whole of or any part of any lot or tract of land used in furtherance of a violation of this act.

Distribution of forfeited assets is governed by Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.7(13)–(15), which also directs a percentage of forfeited assets to Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund, stating,

(13) Unless otherwise provided herein, all personal property which is forfeited under this section shall be liquidated and, after deduction of court costs and the expense of liquidation, the proceeds shall be divided as follows:

(a) If only one (1) law enforcement agency participates in the underlying criminal case out of which the forfeiture arises, fifty percent (50%) of the proceeds shall be forwarded to the State Treasurer and deposited in the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund, and fifty percent (50%) shall be deposited and credited to the budget of the participating law enforcement agency.

(b) If more than one (1) law enforcement agency participates in the underlying criminal case out of which the forfeiture arises, fifty percent (50%) of the proceeds shall be forwarded to the State Treasurer and deposited in the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund, twenty-five percent (25%) of the proceeds shall be deposited and credited to the budget of the law enforcement agency whose officers initiated the criminal case and twenty-five percent (25%) shall

be divided equitably between or among the other participating law enforcement agencies, and shall be deposited and credited to the budgets of the participating law enforcement agencies. In the event that the other participating law enforcement agencies cannot agree on the division of their twenty-five percent (25%), a petition shall be filed by any one of them in the court in which the civil forfeiture case is brought and the court shall make an equitable division.

(14) All money forfeited under this section shall be divided, deposited and credited in the same manner as provided in subsection (13).

(15) All real estate forfeited under the provisions of this section shall be sold to the highest and best bidder at a public auction for cash, the auction to be conducted by the chief law enforcement officer of the initiating law enforcement agency, or his designee, at such place, on such notice and in accordance with the same procedure, as far as practicable, as is required in the case of sales of land under execution at law. The proceeds of the sale shall first be applied to the cost and expense in administering and conducting the sale, then to the satisfaction of all mortgages, deeds of trust, liens and encumbrances of record on the property. The remaining proceeds shall be divided, forwarded and deposited in the same manner as provided in subsection (13).

Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.10 (Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund; authorization to establish program to fund certain victim service providers for victims of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation), the purpose of the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund is to “fund victim service providers that offer shelter, counseling, medical needs, transitional housing and other related services to victims of human trafficking and victims of commercial sexual exploitation at no charge to the victim.”

Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.11(2), (3) (Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund; creation, funding, distribution; convening of committee to develop strategic plan to coordinate state’s response to victims; member terms) governs fund distribution, stating,

(2) The monies in the fund shall be distributed by the Office of the Attorney General, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to fund and assist human trafficking shelters, commercial sexual exploitation shelters and victim service providers . . . . Not more than ten percent (10%) of the monies from the fund may be used for administrative expenses and other expenses . . . ; however, the total amount used for administrative and related expenses during a state fiscal year shall not exceed One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000.00).

(3) Within six (6) months of July 9, 2020, the Office of the Attorney General shall convene a committee comprised of persons described in this subsection (3) to develop a strategic plan to coordinate the state’s response to victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, to include the administration and disbursement of funds for the support and assistance of service providers . . . .

## EXTRA CREDIT



Mississippi law levies financial penalties on child labor trafficking offenders and directs at least a percentage of those financial penalties into a victim services fund. Miss. Code Ann. §§ 99-19-75(2), 97-3-54.7(1)(a), 97-3-54.7(13)–(15), 97-3-54.11(2), (3).



## ISSUE 2: Identification of & Response to Victims

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### Policy Goal 2.1

The definition of child sex trafficking victim in the criminal code includes all commercially sexually exploited children without requiring third party control.

● **FULLY MET**

The definition of child sex trafficking victim includes all commercially sexually exploited children without requiring third party control. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(q) (Human trafficking act; definitions) defines “trafficked person” as “a person subjected to the practices prohibited by this act regardless of whether a perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted, or convicted, and is a term used interchangeably with the terms ‘victim,’ ‘victim of trafficking’ and ‘trafficking victim.’”

Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(1)(c) (Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty) does not require third party control because it can apply directly to buyers of commercial sex with minors based on the term “causes.”<sup>10</sup> It states,

A person who knowingly subjects, or attempts to subject, or who recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides or obtains by any means, or attempts to recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide or obtain by any means, a minor, knowing that the minor will engage in commercial sexual activity,<sup>11</sup> sexually explicit performance, or the production of sexually oriented material, or causes or attempts to cause a minor to engage in commercial sexual activity, sexually explicit performance, or the production of sexually oriented material, shall be guilty of procuring sexual servitude of a minor . . . .

Accordingly, third party control is not required to establish the crime of child sex trafficking or, consequently, to identify a commercially sexually exploited child as a trafficking victim.

### Policy Goal 2.2

State law provides policy guidance to facilitate access to services and assistance for trafficked foreign national children.

○ **NOT MET**

Mississippi law does not provide policy guidance that facilitates appropriate responses to foreign national child sex trafficking victims.

- 2.2.1 Recommendation: Statutorily provide policy guidance that facilitates access to services and assistance for trafficked foreign national children. (*See [Issue Brief 2.2.](#)*)

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<sup>10</sup> See *supra* Policy Goal 1.1 for a full discussion of buyer-applicability under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1.

<sup>11</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(e) defines “commercial sexual activity” as “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to, promised to, or received by any person.”

**Policy Goal 2.3** State law mandates child welfare agencies to conduct trauma-informed CSEC screening for children at risk of sex trafficking.

○ NOT MET

Mississippi law does not require child welfare to conduct trauma-informed CSEC screening of system-involved children and youth who are at risk of sex trafficking.

- 2.3.1 Recommendation: Enact a state law requiring child welfare to screen system-involved children and youth at risk of sex trafficking for experiences of commercial sexual exploitation. (See [Issue Brief 2.3.](#))

**Policy Goal 2.4** State law mandates juvenile justice agencies to conduct trauma-informed CSEC screening of children at risk of sex trafficking.

○ NOT MET

Mississippi law does not require juvenile justice agencies to conduct trauma-informed CSEC screening of children and youth who are at risk of sex trafficking.

- 2.4.1 Recommendation: Enact a state law requiring juvenile justice agencies to screen children and youth who are at risk of sex trafficking for experiences of commercial sexual exploitation. (See [Issue Brief 2.4.](#))

**Policy Goal 2.5** State law prohibits the criminalization of minors under 18 for prostitution offenses and establishes a services-referral protocol as an alternative to arrest.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi law prohibits the criminalization of minors for prostitution offenses and establishes a protocol requiring law enforcement to refer impacted children to a child-serving agency. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-49 (Prostitution; report to Department of Child Protection Services for suspected child sexual abuse or neglect if minor involved; immunity from prosecution if trafficked person involved) states,

(1) A person who is eighteen (18) years of age or older commits the misdemeanor of prostitution if the person knowingly or intentionally performs, or offers or agrees to perform, sexual intercourse or sexual conduct for money or other property.

....

(3) In addition to the mandatory reporting provisions contained in Section 97-5-51, any law enforcement officer who encounters a minor under eighteen (18) years of age and has reasonable cause to suspect that the minor has engaged in acts described in this section may take the minor into emergency custody in accordance with the requirements of the Youth Court Act for the purpose of obtaining an order of removal of the minor, and shall contact and make a report to the Department of Child Protection Services as required in Section 43-21-353 [Duty to inform state agencies and officials ; duty to inform individual whom report has been made of specific allegations] for suspected child sexual abuse or neglect, and the department shall commence an initial investigation into suspected child sexual abuse or neglect as required in Section 43-21-353.

Consequently, statutory protections safeguard minors from prosecution for prostitution offenses, establish a services-referral protocol, and provide mechanisms for taking such minors into emergency custody.



**Policy Goal 2.6** State law prohibits the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for status offenses, and misdemeanor and non-violent felony offenses committed as a result of their trafficking victimization.

○ NOT MET

Mississippi law does not prohibit the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for status offenses nor does it prohibit charging victims with misdemeanors or non-violent felonies committed as a result of their trafficking victimization.

- 2.6.1 Recommendation: Enact a law that prohibits the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for status offenses, and misdemeanors and non-violent felonies committed as a result of their trafficking victimization. (See [Issue Brief 2.6.](#))

**Policy Goal 2.7** State law prohibits the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation offenses, including accomplice and co-conspirator liability, committed as a result of their trafficking victimization.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi law prohibits the criminalization of child sex trafficking victims for sex trafficking and promoting prostitution offenses. Specifically, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(4) (Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty) provides, “A minor who has been identified as a victim of trafficking shall not be liable for criminal activity in violation of this section.” Further, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51(3) (Prostitution; misdemeanor procuring services of prostitute; felony promoting prostitution; penalties) states in part,

If it is determined that a person suspected of or charged with promoting prostitution is a minor under eighteen (18) years of age who meets the definition of a trafficked person<sup>12</sup> as defined in Section 97-3-54.4 [Human trafficking act; definitions], the minor is immune from prosecution for promoting prostitution as a juvenile or adult and provisions of Section 97-3-54.1(4) shall be applicable.

**Policy Goal 2.8** State law provides child sex trafficking victims with an affirmative defense to violent felonies committed as a result of their trafficking victimization.

○ NOT MET

Mississippi law does not provide child sex trafficking victims with an affirmative defense to violent felonies committed as a result of their trafficking victimization.

- 2.8.1 Recommendation: Enact a law that provides child sex trafficking victims with an affirmative defense to violent felonies committed as a result of their trafficking victimization. (See [Issue Brief 2.8.](#))

**Policy Goal 2.9** Juvenile court jurisdiction provides for a developmentally appropriate response.

① PARTIALLY MET

Mississippi law does not provide age-appropriate juvenile court responses for all minors accused of engaging in juvenile or criminal conduct. Mississippi law establishes a minimum age for juvenile court jurisdiction that aligns

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<sup>12</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(q) (Human trafficking act; definitions) defines “trafficked person” as “a person subjected to the practices prohibited by this act regardless of whether a perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted, or convicted, and is a term used interchangeably with the terms ‘victim,’ ‘victim of trafficking’ and ‘trafficking victim.’”

with domestic standards and appropriately extends juvenile court jurisdiction to all minors under 18 years of age. However, governing state statute permits automatic transfers and direct file in cases involving minors charged with certain offenses and fails to require courts to consider the impact of trauma or past victimization in make discretionary transfer determinations.

	Minimum Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction	Maximum Age for Charging Youth in Juvenile Court	Automatic Transfers or Permits Direct File	Discretionary Transfers	Requirement for Court to Consider Trauma or Past Victimization
<b>Summary</b>	13.	17.	Yes. Minors: (1) charged with an offense, which if committed by an adult, would be punishable by life imprisonment or death; (2) charged with a felony offense that includes use of a deadly weapon; or (3) who have been previously transferred to criminal court.	Yes. Minors: (1) charged with a felony offense; or (2) charged with an offense that resulted in bodily harm.	No; however, the court is required to consider, “the child’s home situation, emotional condition and life-style . . . .”
<b>Relevant Statute(s)</b>	Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-151(3) (Jurisdiction)	Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-151(2) (Jurisdiction)	Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-151(1)(a), (b) (Jurisdiction); Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-157(8), (9) (Transfer of jurisdiction to other courts)	Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-157(1) (Transfer of jurisdiction to other courts)	Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-151(5) (Jurisdiction)

Consequently, some minors may still be subject to age-inappropriate juvenile court responses due to state laws that: (1) allow some juvenile cases to be automatically transferred or subject to direct file in criminal court; and (2) do not require the juvenile court to consider past trafficking victimization or trauma when making a transfer determination.

- 2.9.1 Recommendation: Enact comprehensive state laws requiring age-appropriate juvenile court responses for all children accused of engaging in juvenile or criminal conduct. (*See Issue Brief 2.9.*)

**Policy Goal 2.10** State law defines child abuse to include child sex trafficking to ensure access to child welfare services.

● **FULLY MET**

Mississippi law clearly defines “abused child” to include child sex trafficking. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-105(m)–(n), (hh) (Definitions),

(m) “Abused child” means a child whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, whether legally obligated to do so or not, has caused or allowed to be caused, upon the

child, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, commercial sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, mental injury, nonaccidental physical injury or other maltreatment . . . “Abused child” also means a child who is or has been trafficked within the meaning of the Mississippi Human Trafficking Act by any person, without regard to the relationship of the person to the child.

(n) “Sexual abuse” means obscene or pornographic photographing, filming or depiction of children for commercial purposes, or the rape, molestation, incest, prostitution or other such forms of sexual exploitation of children under circumstances which indicate that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or threatened.

....

(hh) “Commercial sexual exploitation” means any sexual act or crime of a sexual nature, which is committed against a child for financial or economic gain, to obtain a thing of value for quid pro quo exchange of property or for any other purpose.

### EXTRA CREDIT



Child labor trafficking is included in the definition of “abused child” under Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-105(m), which expressly identifies victims under the Mississippi Human Trafficking Act.

**Policy Goal 2.11** State law allows for child welfare involvement in sex trafficking cases that do not involve caregiver fault and provides for an alternative, specialized response in those cases.

📍 **PARTIALLY MET**

Although child sex trafficking victims may access child welfare services regardless of parent or caregiver fault, Mississippi law does not provide for a specialized response to non-caregiver trafficking cases.

Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-105(m) (Definitions), “Abused child” also means a child who is or has been trafficked within the meaning of the Mississippi Human Trafficking Act by any person, without regard to the relationship of the person to the child.”

While this definition of “abused child” allows for child welfare involvement in non-caregiver trafficking cases, a specialized response is not required. Instead, the response outlined under Miss. Code Ann. § 43-26-3 (Minors believed to be victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation; caseworker contact to determine next steps; emergency team; presumption of victim status) applies in both caregiver and non-caregiver trafficking cases, which risks inappropriately involving non-offending parents or caregivers in the child welfare system. Miss. Code Ann. § 43-26-3 states,

(1) The Department of Child Protection Services shall immediately send the on-call caseworker to the scene or location chosen by law enforcement (a) when the department is contacted by a law enforcement officer who encounters a minor whom the officer reasonably suspects of being a victim of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation, and (b) the officer requests such assistance using the Mississippi Child Protection Services hotline.

(2) The Department of Child Protection Services, in addition to its duties provided in Section 43-21-353 [Duty to inform state agencies and officials; duty to inform individual about whom report has been made of specific allegations], within twenty-four (24) hours of receiving a report of child abuse, human trafficking of a child or commercial sexual exploitation of a child, sending an on-call caseworker to a location in response to a minor who is reasonably suspected of being a victim of human trafficking or commercial sexual

exploitation at the request of a law enforcement officer, or when a Child Protection Services caseworker encounters a minor who is reasonably suspected of being a victim of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation, shall:

- (a) Make in-person contact with the child to determine appropriate next steps for the protection of the child, or where in-person contact cannot be made within twenty-four (24) hours of receiving the report, shall immediately notify the Coordinator of Services for Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation within the Department of Child Protection Services<sup>13</sup> and law enforcement, and shall document all steps taken to make contact with the child as well as the steps that will be taken to locate and ascertain the safety of the child;
  - (b) Attempt to have an on-site interview with the child's caretaker;
  - (c) Attempt to have law enforcement or an appropriate investigator conduct an on-site interview with the child's suspected offender; and
  - (d) Document and assess the safety of other children in the care or custody of the caretaker and/or who may be at risk of abuse by the suspected offender.
- (2) If the child is suspected to be a victim of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation, the Coordinator of Services for Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation within the Department of Child Protection Services shall activate an emergency, separate and specialized human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation assessment team. The team shall include, at a minimum: (a) an investigator certified by the Mississippi Human Trafficking Operational Task Force Board, (b) an investigator from the Department of Child Protection Services, and (c) a person certified by the office of the Attorney General as an advocate for victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Such emergency assessment team shall be created without authorization of the youth court, or designated by the Office of the Attorney General as an advocate for such victims.

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<sup>13</sup> Under Miss. Code Ann. § 43-26-1(9)(a), (b) (Department of Child Protection Services created; Commissioner of Child Protection Services; department shall be subagency of Department of Human Services; transfer of programs and services under certain statutes from Office of Family and Children's Services to Department of Child Protection Services; employment of Coordinator of Services for Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation; duties; standard operating procedures for investigation, custody and services provided alleged victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation),

- (a) The Commissioner of Child Protection Services shall hire a Coordinator of Services for Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation within the Department of Child Protection Services whose duties shall include, but not be limited to, the following:
  - (i) To form specialized human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation assessment teams to respond on an as-needed basis to act as an emergency, separate and specialized response and assessment team to rapidly respond to the needs of children who are victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation;
  - (ii) To identify victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation;
  - (iii) To monitor, record and distribute federal human trafficking funds received by the Department of Child Protection Services;
  - (iv) To employ staff to investigate allegations of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation; and
  - (v) To develop and coordinate services within the Department of Child Protection Services and with outside service providers for victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.
- (b) The Commissioner of Child Protection Services shall develop standard operating procedures for the investigation, custody and services provided to alleged victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

*See infra* note 28.

(3) Any person under eighteen (18) years of age taken into custody under the provisions of Section 97-29-49 [Prostitution; report to department of child protection services for suspected child sexual abuse or neglect if minor involved; immunity from prosecution if trafficked person involved] shall be presumed a victim of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

2.11.1 Recommendation: Statutorily provide for a specialized response to non-caregiver child sex trafficking cases. (*See [Issue Brief 2.11.](#)*)





## ISSUE 3: Continuum of Care

**Policy Goal 3.1** State law mandates a process for coordinating access to specialized services for child sex trafficking victims that does not require involvement in child-serving systems.

○ NOT MET

Mississippi law does not mandate a process for coordinating access to specialized, community-based services for child sex trafficking victims that does not require involvement in a child-serving system.

- 3.1.1 Recommendation: Statutorily mandate a process for coordinating access to specialized services for child sex trafficking victims that does not require involvement in child-serving systems. (See [Issue Brief 3.1](#).)

**Policy Goal 3.2** State law provides for a survivor-centered multi-disciplinary team response to child sex trafficking cases.

● FULLY MET

Mississippi law requires a multi-disciplinary team response to child sex trafficking cases. Specifically, Miss. Code Ann. § 43-15-51(1)–(3)(a) (Formation of multidisciplinary child protection teams to evaluate and investigate reports of child abuse and neglect; membership; order of youth court prerequisite to formation of teams; participation by experts and child advocacy centers; disclosure of information obtained from task force meetings prohibited) provides for the creation of MDTs to intervene in alleged instances of child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, stating,

- (1) The district attorneys, the Department of Human Services or the Department of Child Protection Services may initiate formal cooperative agreements with the appropriate agencies to create multidisciplinary child protection teams in order to implement a coordinated multidisciplinary team approach to intervention in reports involving alleged commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, or severe or potential felony child physical or sexual abuse, exploitation, or maltreatment . . . . The purpose of the team or task force shall be to assist in the evaluation and investigation of reports and to provide consultation and coordination for agencies involved in child protection cases. The agencies to be included as members of the multidisciplinary team are: the district attorney's office, city and county law enforcement agencies, county attorneys, youth court prosecutors, the Human Trafficking Coordinator or his or her designee and other agencies as appropriate. The Department of Child Protection Services shall be included as a member of the multidisciplinary team if the department does not initiate creation of the team.
- (2) Except as otherwise provided in Section 43-26-3 [Procedures when responding to allegation of child abuse, or human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of a child; presumption that minor taken into custody under Section 97-29-49 is victim of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.],<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Pursuant to Miss. Code. Ann. § 43-26-3(2),

to implement the multidisciplinary child abuse team, the team or task force must be authorized by court order from the appropriate youth court. The court order will designate which agencies will participate in the cooperative multidisciplinary team.

(3)

(a) Teams created under this section may invite other persons to serve on the team, who have knowledge of and experience in child abuse and neglect and commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking matters. These persons may include licensed mental and physical health practitioners and physicians, dentists, representatives of the district attorney's office and the Attorney General's office, experts in the assessment and treatment of substance abuse or sexual abuse, the victim assistance coordinator of the district attorney's office, staff members of a child advocacy center, sexual assault nurse examiners and experts in providing services to commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking victims . . . .

## EXTRA CREDIT



Mississippi law requires a multi-disciplinary response to child labor trafficking cases under Miss. Code Ann. § 43-15-51 based on the definition of “trafficked person” under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(q) (Human trafficking act; definitions), which includes “a person subjected to the practices prohibited by this act regardless of whether a perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted, or convicted, and is a term used interchangeably with the terms ‘victim,’ ‘victim of trafficking’ and ‘trafficking victim.’”

**Policy Goal 3.3** State law requires child welfare to provide access to specialized services for identified sex trafficked children and youth.

① **PARTIALLY MET**

Although Mississippi law requires child welfare to provide access to services that are specialized to the unique needs of child sex trafficking victims, the response is limited to children in the Department of Child Protection Services' custody. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 43-15-13(3), (6)(A), (11)(p)<sup>15</sup> (Foster care placement program; objectives; system of individualized plans and reviews; training program for persons who provide foster care and relative care; placement priorities and goals; changes in placement; rights and responsibilities of persons who provide foster care and relative care),

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If the child is suspected to be a victim of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation, the Coordinator of Services for Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation within the Department of Child Protection Services shall activate an emergency, separate and specialized human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation assessment team. The team shall include, at a minimum: (a) an investigator certified by the Mississippi Human Trafficking Operational Task Force Board, (b) an investigator from the Department of Child Protection Services, and (c) a person certified by the office of the Attorney General as an advocate for victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Such emergency assessment team shall be created without authorization of the youth court, or designated by the Office of the Attorney General as an advocate for such victims.

<sup>15</sup> The text of Miss. Code Ann. § 43-15-13 cited here and elsewhere in this report includes amendments made by the enactment of House Bill 510 during the 2023 Regular Session of the Mississippi state legislature (effective July 1, 2023).

(3) The Department of Child Protection Services shall administer a system of individualized plans, reviews and reports once every six (6) months for each child under its custody within the State of Mississippi, which document each child who has been adjudged a neglected, abandoned or abused child, including a child alleged to have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and/or human trafficking and whose custody was changed by court order as a result of that adjudication, and each public or private facility licensed by the department . . . . [T]he department shall establish policy and procedures designed to appropriately place children in permanent homes, and provide counseling services and other appropriate services to children who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking. The policy shall include a system of reviews for all children in foster care, as follows: foster care counselors in the department shall . . . provide care for victims of commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking . . . .

. . . .  
(6)

(a) The Department of Child Protection Services, with the cooperation and assistance of the State Department of Health, shall develop and implement a training program for foster care parents to indoctrinate them as to their proper responsibilities upon a child's entry into their foster care. The program shall provide a minimum of twelve (12) clock hours of training, which shall include training foster care parents about providing mental and physical support to children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking . . . .

. . . .

(11) . . . The Department of Child Protection Services shall extend the following rights to persons who provide foster care and relative care:

. . . .

(p) Support from the family protection worker or the family protection specialist in efforts to do a better day-to-day job in caring for the child and in working to achieve the agency's objectives for the child and the birth family through provision of:

. . . .

(iii) Help in using appropriate resources to meet the child's needs, including counseling or other services for victims of commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking;

. . . .

(v) Information regarding whether the child experienced commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking;

. . . .

For child sex trafficking victims who remain in their homes, Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-353(9) (Duty to inform state agencies and officials; duty to inform individual about whom report has been made of specific allegations) only requires child welfare to provide information on available services. Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-353(9) states,

If a child protective investigation does not result in an out-of-home placement, a child protective investigator must provide information to the parent or guardians about community service programs that provide respite care, counseling and support for children who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking, voluntary guardianship or other support services for families in crisis.

- 3.3.1 Recommendation: Strengthen existing law by requiring child welfare to provide access to specialized services for all child sex trafficking victims. (See [\*Issue Brief 3.3\*](#).)

**Policy Goal 3.4** State law requires the juvenile justice system to provide access to specialized services for identified sex trafficked children and youth.

○ NOT MET

Mississippi law does not provide access to specialized services for identified sex trafficked children and youth in the juvenile justice system.

- 3.4.1 Recommendation: Statutorily require the juvenile justice system to provide access to specialized services for identified sex trafficked children and youth. (See [Issue Brief 3.4](#).)

**Policy Goal 3.5** State law extends foster care services to older foster youth.

● **PARTIALLY MET**

Mississippi law extends foster care services to youth under 21 years of age. However, these services are not extended to youth under 23 years of age as permitted under federal law.<sup>16</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 43-15-13(1) (Foster care placement program; objectives; system of individualized plans and reviews; training program for persons who provide foster care and relative care; placement priorities and goals; changes in placement; notice to families; rights and responsibilities of persons who provide foster care and relative care) defines “children” as “persons found within the state who are under the age of twenty-one (21) years, and who were placed in the custody of the Department of Child Protection Services by the youth court of the appropriate county.” Further, Miss. Code Ann. § 43-15-13(2) indicates that “[t]he Department of Child Protection Services shall establish a foster care placement program for children whose custody lies with the department.”

- 3.5.1 Recommendation: Strengthen existing law to better support transition age youth by extending transitional foster care services to youth under 23 years of age. (See [Issue Brief 3.5](#).)

**Policy Goal 3.6** State funding is appropriated to support specialized services and a continuum of care for sex trafficked children regardless of system involvement.

● **FULLY MET**

The Mississippi state legislature appropriated funds during the 2023 legislative session to support the coordination of and access to community-based, specialized services for child and youth survivors of sex trafficking. Further, appropriations were made to support child-serving agencies in addressing the needs of child and youth survivors of sex trafficking.

2023 Appropriations				
Bill	Recipient	Amount	Intended Purpose	Term
HB 1641	Office of the Attorney General	\$2,500,000 <sup>17</sup>	To provide funds to the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund. <sup>18</sup>	FY 2024

<sup>16</sup> For more information, see Shared Hope Int'l, *Issue Brief 3.5: Continuum of Care*, <https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/issue-briefs/#IB3.5> (discussing federal laws that allow for funded foster care services to be extended to youth under 23 years of age).

<sup>17</sup> Further, Enacted Senate Bill 2664, § 7 (2023) directs the State Fiscal Officer to transfer \$2,500,000 from the Capital Expense Fund to the Victim of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund. Similarly, Enacted Senate Bill 2452, § 4 (2023) directs the State Fiscal Officer to transfer \$2,500,000 to the Human Trafficking Fund.

<sup>18</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.10 (Victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation fund; authorization to establish program to fund certain victim service providers for victims of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation), states in part,

2023 Legislative Session				July 1 <sup>st</sup> -June 30 <sup>th</sup>
SB 3012	Department of Public Safety	\$250,000	For the duties and operations of a Statewide Human Trafficking Coordinator and a data analyst within the Bureau of Investigation in the Department of Public Safety, who shall coordinate all statewide activities and work with the Department of Child Protection Services for all victims recovered.	FY 2024
2023 Legislative Session				July 1 <sup>st</sup> -June 30 <sup>th</sup>
HB 1625	Department of Child Protection Services	\$250,000	To maintain a 24-hour hotline that is to be manned at all times, and for a coordinator to work with the Department of Public Safety, and to contract with outside agencies or service providers to organize for the provision of specialized services, including counseling services and other appropriate care to children who have been victims of commercial and sexual exploitation or human trafficking.	FY 2024
2023 Legislative Session				July 1 <sup>st</sup> -June 30 <sup>th</sup>

## EXTRA CREDIT



The Mississippi Legislature made an appropriation for FY 2024 that provides funding to the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund, which will be used to fund victim service providers that specialize in serving victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, regardless of age.



The Mississippi Legislature made an appropriation for FY 2024 that provides funding to the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund, which will be used to fund victim service providers that specialize in serving victims of human trafficking, including victims of child labor trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation.

The Office of the Attorney General is authorized to establish a program to fund victim service providers that offer shelter, counseling, medical needs, transitional housing and other related services to victims of human trafficking and victims of commercial sexual exploitation at no charge to the victim. The program shall be funded from monies in the “Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund.”





## ISSUE 4: Access to Justice for Trafficking Survivors

### Policy Goal 4.1 State law allows trafficking victims to seek emergency civil orders of protection.

○ NOT MET

While civil orders of protection exist under Mississippi law, this protection is not expressly available to victims of child sex trafficking and CSEC.

- 4.1.1 Recommendation: Enact legislation expressly allowing victims of trafficking and CSEC to obtain ex parte civil orders of protection against their exploiters. (See [Issue Brief 4.1](#).)

### Policy Goal 4.2 Ineligibility factors for crime victims' compensation do not prevent victims of child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) from accessing compensation.

● PARTIALLY MET

Although Mississippi's crime victims' compensation laws define "victim" broadly enough to include victims of child sex trafficking and CSEC, ineligibility factors may prevent a commercially sexually exploited child from accessing an award.

For purposes of accessing crime victims' compensation, Miss. Code Ann. § 99-41-5(l) (Definitions) defines "victim" as "a person who suffers personal injury or death as a result of criminally injurious conduct, regardless of whether that person was the intended victim of the criminally injurious conduct." "Criminally injurious conduct is defined under Miss. Code Ann. § 99-41-5(d) as follows:

[A]n act occurring or attempted within the geographical boundaries of this state, or to a resident of Mississippi while that resident is within any other state of the United States or any foreign country, which state or foreign country does not provide compensation for those injuries caused by an act for which compensation would be available had the act occurred in Mississippi, and which act results in personal injury or death to a victim for which punishment by fine, imprisonment or death may be imposed. For purposes of this chapter, "criminally injurious conduct" shall also include federal offenses committed within the state that result in personal injury or death to a victim and which are punishable by fine, imprisonment or death, and delinquent acts as defined in Section 43-21-105 which result in personal injury or death to a victim and which, if committed by an adult, would be a crime punishable by fine, imprisonment or death.

Despite this broad definition, certain ineligibility factors may still limit a commercially sexually exploited child's ability to seek crime victims' compensation. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 99-41-17 (Compensation awards; conditions; exceptions; reduction),

- (1) Compensation shall not be awarded under this chapter:

....

- (b) Unless the claim has been filed with the director within thirty-six (36) months after the crime occurred<sup>19</sup> . . . ;
- (c) To a claimant or victim who was the offender or an accomplice to the offender, or, except in cases of children under the age of consent as specified in Section 97-3-65 [Statutory rape], 97-3-97 [Sexual battery] or 97-5-23 [Homicide], Mississippi Code of 1972, who encouraged or in any way knowingly participated in criminally injurious conduct;
- (d) To another person, if the award would unjustly benefit the offender or accomplice;
- (e) Unless the criminally injurious conduct resulting in injury or death was reported to a law enforcement officer within seventy-two (72) hours after its occurrence or unless it is found that there was good cause for the failure to report within such time;<sup>20</sup>
- . . . .
- (i) To a claimant or victim who, subsequent to the injury for which application is made, is convicted of any felony, and the conviction becomes known to the director;
- (j) To any claimant or victim who has been under the actual or constructive supervision of a department of corrections for a felony conviction within five (5) years prior to the injury or death for which application has been made;
- (k) To any claimant or victim who, at the time of the criminally injurious conduct upon which the claim for compensation is based, engaged in conduct unrelated to the crime upon which the claim for compensation is based that either was (i) a felony, or (ii) a delinquent act which, if committed by an adult, would constitute a felony;
- (l) To any claimant or victim who knowingly furnishes any false or misleading information or knowingly fails or omits to disclose a material fact or circumstance.
- (2) Compensation otherwise payable to a claimant shall be diminished to the extent:
  - . . . .
  - (b) Of the degree of responsibility for the cause of injury or death attributable to the victim or claimant.
- (3) Upon a finding that the claimant or victim has not fully cooperated with appropriate law enforcement agencies and prosecuting attorneys, an award of compensation may be denied, withdrawn or reduced.
- (4) Compensation otherwise payable to a claimant or victim may be denied or reduced to a claimant or victim who, at the time of the crime upon which the claim for compensation is based, was engaging in or attempting to engage in other unlawful activity unrelated to the crime upon which the claim for compensation is based.

#### 4.2.1 Recommendation: Statutorily exempt victims of child sex trafficking and CSEC from ineligibility factors for crime victims' compensation. (*See [Issue Brief 4.2.](#)*)

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<sup>19</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 99-41-17(1)(b) does provide exceptions for cases involving child sexual abuse or where good cause is shown, stating that compensation will be denied:

Unless the claim has been filed with the director . . . in cases of child sexual abuse, within thirty-six (36) months after the crime was reported to law enforcement or the Department of Child Protection Services, but in no event later than the victim's twenty-fifth birthday. For good cause, the director may extend the time period allowed for filing a claim for an additional period not to exceed twelve (12) months.

However, Chapter 41 (Mississippi Crime Victims' Compensation Act) does not define "child sexual abuse" or "good cause" for purposes of this chapter, so it is unclear whether the exception would apply in all cases involving child sex trafficking and CSEC.

The text of Miss. Code Ann. § 99-41-17 cited here and elsewhere in this report includes amendments made by the enactment of House Bill 1149 during the 2023 Regular Session of the Mississippi state legislature (effective July 1, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> As with the filing deadline, "good cause" is not defined under Chapter 41. *See supra* note 19.

## INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

“Both adult and child victims of human trafficking have filed for and have been awarded Crime Victims’ Compensation from the Attorney General’s Office. Although it is not specifically addressed in the statute, the Administrative Rules for the Crime Victims’ Compensation program exempt victims of human trafficking from certain reporting requirements. Section 207(4) of the Administrative Rules provides that: ‘Consideration of relevant circumstances may be given in cases of domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking. The Division may waive this requirement if there is compelling health or safety reasons that would jeopardize the well-being of the victim/claimant.’”

*-Mississippi Attorney General’s Office*

**Policy Goal 4.3** Sex trafficked children and youth may vacate delinquency adjudications and criminal convictions for any offense arising from trafficking victimization.

**1 PARTIALLY MET**

Although Mississippi law allows trafficking victims to vacate criminal convictions, vacatur is unavailable for delinquency adjudications arising from trafficking victimization. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(5) (Human trafficking Act; injunctive relief and other relief for victims of trafficking; confidentiality),

At any time after a conviction under this act [Human Trafficking Act], the court in which the conviction was entered may, upon appropriate motion, vacate the conviction if the court finds the defendant’s participation in the offense was the result of being a victim. Official documentation from a federal, state or local government agency as to the defendant’s status as a victim at the time of the offense creates a presumption that the defendant’s participation in the offense was a result of being a victim, but official documentation is not required to grant a motion under this subsection.

However, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(5) applies specifically to “convictions,” and Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-561(5) (Adjudication of status, standard of proof, and findings) states, “No adjudication upon the status of any child shall operate to impose any of the civil disabilities ordinarily imposed on an adult because of a criminal conviction, nor shall any child be deemed a criminal by reason of adjudication, nor shall that adjudication be deemed a conviction.” Accordingly, a child sex trafficking victim would be unable to vacate a delinquency adjudication under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(5).

Further, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(5) limits applicability to convictions under the Human Trafficking Act, which fails to recognize the array of crimes trafficking victims are charged with and leaves many survivors without any avenue for relief.

- 4.3.1 Recommendation: Strengthen existing law by allowing sex trafficked children and youth to vacate delinquency adjudications and criminal convictions for any offense arising from trafficking victimization. (See [Issue Brief 4.3](#).)

**Policy Goal 4.4** State law mandates restitution for child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) offenses.

● **PARTIALLY MET**

Restitution is mandatory in cases involving child sex trafficking but not for cases involving CSEC, which are codified under separate chapters of the code. Under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(2), (4) (Human Trafficking Act; injunctive and other relief for victims of trafficking; confidentiality),

(2) Notwithstanding any provisions to the contrary in Section 99-37-1 et seq., the court shall order restitution to the victim for any offense under this chapter [Crimes against the person]. The order of restitution under this section shall direct the defendant to pay the victim, through the appropriate court mechanism, the full amount of the victim's pecuniary damages. For the purposes of determining restitution, the term "victim" means the individual harmed as a result of a crime under this chapter, including, in the case of a victim who is under eighteen (18) years of age, incompetent, incapacitated, or deceased, the legal guardian of the victim or a representative of the victim's estate, or another family member, or any other person appointed as suitable by the court, but in no event shall the defendant be named as such a representative or guardian. The court may order restitution even if the victim is absent from the jurisdiction or unavailable.

....

(4) The application of one (1) civil remedy under any provision of this act shall not preclude the application of any other remedy, civil or criminal, under this act or any other provision of law. Civil remedies under this act are supplemental.

Restitution is available more generally to victims of other crimes under Miss Code Ann. § 99-37-3 (Imposition and amount of restitution); however, restitution under Miss. Code Ann. § 99-37-3 is discretionary. It states,

(1) When a person is convicted of criminal activities which have resulted in pecuniary damages, in addition to any other sentence it may impose, the court may order that the defendant make restitution to the victim; provided, however, that the justice court shall not order restitution in an amount exceeding Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00).

(2) In determining whether to order restitution which may be complete, partial or nominal, the court shall take into account:

(a) The financial resources of the defendant and the burden that payment of restitution will impose, with due regard to the other obligations of the defendant;

(b) The ability of the defendant to pay restitution on an installment basis or on other conditions to be fixed by the court; and

(c) The rehabilitative effect on the defendant of the payment of restitution and the method of payment.

(3) If the defendant objects to the imposition, amount or distribution of the restitution, the court shall, at the time of sentencing, allow him to be heard on such issue.

(4) If the court determines that restitution is inappropriate or undesirable, an order reciting such finding shall be entered, which should also state the underlying circumstances for such determination.

4.4.1 Recommendation: Statutorily mandate restitution in CSEC cases. (*See [Issue Brief 4.4.](#)*)

**Policy Goal 4.5** State law provides child sex trafficking victims with a trafficking-specific civil remedy.

● **FULLY MET**

Mississippi law allows victims of child sex trafficking to pursue civil remedies against their exploiters. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-3(1)–(4) (Defendant engaging in human trafficking liable to person trafficked for certain damages; limitations applicable to action),

(1) A defendant who engages in human trafficking<sup>21</sup> or who willfully, intentionally and knowingly benefits from participating in a venture<sup>22</sup> that trafficks another person is liable to the person trafficked, as provided by this chapter [Civil Liability for Engaging in Human Trafficking], for damages proximately caused by the trafficking of that person by the defendant or venture.

....

(3) It is not a defense to liability under this chapter that a defendant has been acquitted or has not been prosecuted or convicted under Section 97-3-54.1 [Human Trafficking Act; prohibited conduct; penalty] or Section 97-3-54.4 [Human trafficking act; aiding, abetting, or conspiring to violate human trafficking provisions], or has been convicted of a different offense or of a different type or class of offense, for the conduct that is alleged to give rise to liability under this act.

(4) The cause of action created by this section is in addition to any other remedy provided by common law or statute.

Under Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-5 (Remedies), “A claimant who prevails in a suit under this act may be awarded: (a) Compensatory damages; (b) Court costs; and (c) Reasonable attorneys’ fees.”

Further, Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(3), (4) (Human Trafficking Act; injunctive and other relief for victims of trafficking; confidentiality) provides,

(3) Any person who is injured by reason of any violation of the provisions of this chapter [Crimes against the person] shall have a cause of action against any person or enterprise convicted of engaging in activity in violation of this chapter for threefold the actual damages sustained and, when appropriate, punitive damages. The person shall also recover attorney’s fees in the trial and appellate courts and reasonable costs of investigation and litigation.

(4) The application of one (1) civil remedy under any provision of this act shall not preclude the application of any other remedy, civil or criminal, under this act or any other provision of law. Civil remedies under this act are supplemental.

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<sup>21</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-1 (Definitions) defines “human trafficking” as “actions that constitute an offense under Section 97-3-54.1 [Human Trafficking Act; prohibited conduct; penalty] or 97-3-54.3 [Human trafficking act; aiding, abetting, or conspiring to violate human trafficking provisions].”

<sup>22</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-1 defines “venture” as “any group of two (2) or more individuals associated in fact, whether or not a legal entity.”



## EXTRA CREDIT



Mississippi law provides sex trafficked youth with a trafficking-specific civil remedy under Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-3(1)–(4) and Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(2), which expressly include victims of sex trafficking under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1 (Human Trafficking Act; prohibited conduct; penalty) regardless of their age.



Mississippi law provides child labor trafficking victims with a trafficking-specific civil remedy under Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-3(1)–(4) and Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(3), which expressly include victims of Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(4) (Human Trafficking Act; prohibited conduct; penalty).

**Policy Goal 4.6** Statutes of limitation for criminal and civil actions for child sex trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) offenses are eliminated to allow prosecutors and victims a realistic opportunity to pursue criminal action and legal remedies.

### PARTIALLY MET

Although prosecutions for trafficking and specified CSEC offenses may commence at any time, the civil statute of limitation for trafficking-specific civil actions is not lengthened or eliminated. Regarding prosecutions, Miss. Code Ann. § 99-1-5(1)(a)<sup>23</sup> (Limitations; exceptions) states in part,

The passage of time shall never bar prosecution against any person for the offenses . . . promoting prostitution under Section 97-29-51(2) [Prostitution; misdemeanor procuring services of prostitute; felony promoting prostitution; penalties] when the person involved is a minor, or for any human trafficking offense described in Section 97-3-54.1(1)(a), (1)(b) or (1)(c) [Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty], Section 97-3-54.2 [Human trafficking act; destruction, concealment, or confiscation of passport or other immigration document for purpose of preventing person's freedom of movement or ability to travel; penalties], or Section 93-3-54.3 [Human trafficking act; aiding, abetting, or conspiring to violate human trafficking provisions].

Otherwise, Miss. Code Ann. § 99-1-5(2) establishes a general 2-year statute of limitation for prosecutions, stating, “A person shall not be prosecuted for any other offense not listed in this section unless the prosecution for the offense is commenced within two (2) years next after the commission thereof.”

Regarding civil actions, the statute of limitation for a civil claim filed under Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-3 (Defendant engaging in human trafficking liable to person trafficked for certain damages; limitations applicable to action) is set forth under subsection (5) of that statute, which states,

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<sup>23</sup> The text of Miss. Code Ann. § 99-1-5 cited here and elsewhere in this report includes amendments made by the enactment of House Bill 405 and Senate Bill 2337 during the 2023 Regular Session of the Mississippi state legislature (effective July 1, 2023).

An action under this act shall be filed within:

- (a) Three (3) years after the cause of action accrued; or
- (b) Three (3) years after the claimant reaches the age of majority if at the time the cause of action accrued the claimant was a minor.

Claims filed under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(3), (4) (Human Trafficking Act; injunctive and other relief for victims of trafficking; confidentiality) are subject to the general statute of limitation provided from under Miss. Code Ann. § 15-1-49(1)<sup>24</sup> (Limitations applicable to actions not otherwise specifically provided for), which is also 3 years. Accordingly, Mississippi law does not lengthen or eliminate the civil statute of limitation for trafficking-related civil actions as the limitation period for both Miss. Code Ann. § 11-73-3 and Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.6(3), (4) is the same as the general limitation period under Miss. Code Ann. § 15-1-49(1).

- 4.6.1 Recommendation: Eliminate the statute of limitation for filing trafficking-specific civil actions. (See [\*Issue Brief 4.6.\*](#))

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<sup>24</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 15-1-49(1) states, “All actions for which no other period of limitation is prescribed shall be commenced within three (3) years next after the cause of such action accrued, and not after.”



## ISSUE 5: Tools for a Victim-Centered Criminal Justice Response

### Policy Goal 5.1

Non-testimonial evidence may be admitted through a child sex trafficking-specific hearsay exception to reduce reliance of victim testimony.

#### ● PARTIALLY MET

Although Mississippi law does not expressly allow non-testimonial, out-of-court statements made by commercially sexually exploited children to be admitted into evidence, there is a broad hearsay exception that applies to victims of criminal conduct that encompasses the abuse experienced by child sex trafficking victims; however, this protection is only available to younger minors. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 13-1-403(1) (Admissibility of child's out-of-court statements),

An out-of-court statement made by a child under the age of twelve (12) describing any act of child abuse, sexual abuse or any other offense involving an unlawful sexual act, contact, intrusion or penetration performed in the presence of, with, by or on the declarant child, not otherwise admissible, is admissible in evidence to prove the contents thereof, if:

- (a) Such statement is made for the purpose of receiving assistance or advice in order to prevent or mitigate the recurrence of the offenses, or in order to obtain advice about the psychological, social or familial consequences associated with the offenses; and
- (b) Such statement is made to a person on whom the child should reasonably be able to rely for assistance, counseling or advice; and
- (c) The child either:
  - (i) Is available to testify; or
  - (ii) Is unavailable as a witness, provided that there is other corroborative evidence of the abuse or offense. A finding of unavailability, except in those situations specified by Rule 804 of the Mississippi Rules of Evidence, shall require a finding by the court, based on the specific behavioral indicators described in Section 13-1-411, that the child's participation in the trial would result in a substantial likelihood of traumatic emotional or mental distress; and
- (d) The court finds in a hearing conducted outside the presence of the jury that the time, content and circumstances of the statement provide sufficient guarantees of trustworthiness. In determining the trustworthiness of the statement, the court may consider the age and maturity of the child, the nature and duration of the abuse or offense alleged, factors which may detract from the declarant's credibility, information provided about the child's reliability based on the specific behavioral indicators described in Section 13-1-411, or any other factor deemed appropriate.

Notably, child victims who are 12 years of age or older are not protected by this hearsay exception.

- 5.1.1 Recommendation: Strengthen existing hearsay protections to expressly apply in child sex trafficking and CSEC cases. (*See [Issue Brief 5.1](#).*)

### Policy Goal 5.2

State law provides child sex trafficking victims with alternatives to live, in-court testimony regardless of the prosecuted offense.

#### ● PARTIALLY MET

Although Mississippi's closed circuit television (CCTV) law does not expressly apply in trafficking cases, it applies to criminal conduct that encompasses the abuse experienced by child sex trafficking victims; however, this protection is only available to younger minors. Specifically, Miss. Code Ann. § 13-1-405(1)–(4) (Use of closed circuit

television to show child's testimony) permits the court to order the testimony of a child under 16 years of age who is the victim of a sexual offense to be taken by CCTV stating,

(1) Upon motion and hearing in camera, the trial court may order that the testimony of a child under the age of sixteen (16) that an unlawful sexual act, contact, intrusion, penetration or other sexual offense was committed upon him or her, or that he or she witnessed its perpetration upon another child, be taken outside of the courtroom and shown in the courtroom by means of closed circuit television, upon a finding based on specific behavioral indicators described in Section 13-1-411 [Behavioral indicators used to determine applicability of evidentiary provisions], that there is a substantial likelihood that the child will suffer traumatic emotional or mental distress if compelled to testify in open court.

....

(4) Closed circuit television testimony may be taken by any method not inconsistent with the Mississippi Rules of Civil Procedure and the Mississippi Uniform Criminal Rules of Circuit Court Practice. After a determination that the defendant's presence would cause a substantial likelihood of traumatic emotional or mental distress to the child, the judge may exclude the defendant from the room where the testimony is taken. In any case in which the defendant is so excluded, arrangements must be made for the defense attorney to be in continual contact with the defendant by any appropriate private electronic or telephonic method throughout the questioning. The defendant and the jury must be able to observe the demeanor of the child witness at all times during the questioning.

As noted above, however, child victims who are 16 years of age or older are not permitted to testify by an alternative, thereby increasing their risk of re-traumatization from testifying.

- 5.2.1 Recommendation: Strengthen existing protections to allow all commercially sexually exploited children to testify by an alternative method regardless of the child's age and the offense charged. (*See [Issue Brief 5.2.](#)*)

**Policy Goal 5.3** Child sex trafficking victims have access to victim protections in the criminal justice system.

● FULLY MET

	Child sex trafficking victims have the right to a victim advocate	Child sex trafficking victims testifying against their exploiter are provided supports in the courtroom	Child sex trafficking victims' identifying information is protected from disclosure in court records
<b>Summary</b>	Child victims of trafficking and CSEC have a statutory right to a certified victim advocate provided through the Attorney General's office.	Children who testify have a range of protections available during their testimony, including an advocate or support person, a facility dog, and a secure and child-friendly waiting area.	Identifying and contact information of crime victims are not public record. The court is also specifically prohibited from publicly disclosing identifying information involving a child victim.
<b>Relevant Statute(s)</b>	Miss. Code Ann. § 43-26-3(2) (Procedures when responding to allegation of child abuse, or human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of a child; presumption that minor taken into custody under Section 97-29-49 is victim of human trafficking)	Miss. Code Ann. § 99-43-101(i) (Rights of children testifying in criminal proceedings)	Miss. Code Ann. § 99-43-25(2) (Victim residence and identification information; petition, hearing and confidentiality); Miss. Code Ann. § 99-43-101(4)(b) (Rights of children testifying in criminal proceedings)

	and commercial sexual exploitation)		
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**Policy Goal 5.4** State law provides for privileged communications between caseworkers and child sex trafficking victims.

● **FULLY MET**

Mississippi law provides for a child sex trafficking-specific caseworker privilege that protects a child sex trafficking victim's communications with their caseworker from being disclosed. Under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(2)(a) (Communications of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking with advocates deemed confidential),

No advocate<sup>25</sup> shall disclose any confidential victim communication<sup>26</sup> or personally identifying information of a victim<sup>27</sup> or be compelled to testify to or surrender any confidential victim communications or personally identifying information in any civil or criminal proceeding or in any legislative or administrative proceeding, without the prior informed, written and time-limited consent of the victim, except in the following circumstances: (i) where disclosure is mandated under Section 43-21-353 [Duty to inform state

<sup>25</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(a) defines "advocate" as follows:

[A]n employee, contractor, agent or volunteer of a victim service provider whose primary purpose is to render services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking and who has completed a minimum of twenty (20) hours of training in the areas of dynamics of victimization, substantive laws relating to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking, crisis intervention techniques, communications skills, working with diverse populations, an overview of the state's criminal and civil justice systems, information regarding pertinent hospital procedures, victim compensation, and information regarding state and community resources for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, or mandatory training required by the Office Against Interpersonal Violence, whichever is greater. "Advocate" also means a person employed by a victim service provider who supervises any employee, contractor, agent or volunteer rendering services. The term advocate also means a third party (i) present to further the interest of the victim in receiving services; (ii) necessary for the transmission of the communication; or (iii) to whom disclosure is reasonably necessary to accomplish the purposes for the victim seeking services.

"Victim service provider" is defined under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(j) as follows:

[A]n organization whose primary purpose or mission is to provide services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. This term includes umbrella organizations that have specific victim service programs as part of its organization. Any provisions regarding confidentiality only extend to the specific program providing victim services and not to the entire organization.

<sup>26</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(b) defines "confidential victim communications" as follows:

[A]ll information, whether written or oral, collected, transmitted or shared between a victim and an advocate in the course of that relationship and maintained by the victim service program in connection with services requested, utilized or denied. "Confidential victim communications" includes, but is not limited to, information received or given by the advocate in the course of the working relationship, advice, records, reports, notes, memoranda, working papers, electronic communications, case files, history, and statistical data that contain personally identifying information.

<sup>27</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(i) defines "victim" as "a person alleging domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking, who consults a victim advocate for the purpose of obtaining, for the person, advice, counseling, or other services concerning mental, emotional, or physical injuries suffered as a result of the offense, whether or not services are actually received." "Human trafficking" is defined under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(d) as "any alleged criminal act in violation of Section 97-3-54.1 [Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty], whether or not a civil or criminal action arises as a result of the alleged violation."



agencies and officials; duty to inform individual about whom report has been made of specific allegations], Section 43-47-7 [Reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation; establishment of central register; confidentiality], Section 43-47-37 [Reporting of abuse and exploitation of patients and residents of care facilities], Section 97-3-54.1(4) [Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty], Section 97-5-51 [Mandatory reporting of sex crimes against minors; definitions; procedure; report contents; forensic samples; penalties], Section 97-29-49 [Prostitution; report to department of child protection services for suspected child sexual abuse or neglect if minor involved; immunity from prosecution if trafficked person involved], or any other applicable provision of state or federal law; (ii) where failure to disclose is likely to result in imminent risk of serious bodily harm or death of the victim or another person, or when the victim dies or is incapable of giving consent and disclosure is required for an official law enforcement investigation or criminal proceedings regarding the cause of the victim's death or incapacitation; or (iii) where disclosure is required pursuant to a valid court order.

However, Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(2)(b) allows for disclosure under the following circumstances:

Upon motion of a party in a civil action or of the defendant in a criminal action, the court may compel disclosure of certain confidential victim communications or personally identifying information, if the court determines, after in-camera review, that all of the following conditions are met: (i) the information sought is relevant and material evidence of the facts and circumstances involved in an alleged criminal act which is the subject of a criminal proceeding; (ii) the probative value of the information outweighs the harmful effect, if any, of disclosure on the victim, the advocacy relationship and provision and receipt of services; and (iii) the information cannot be obtained by reasonable means from any other source . . . .

Additionally, child sex trafficking victims may benefit from privileged communications protections covering certain behavioral and mental health professionals and clients if the victim received care or services from such professionals.

Statute	Profession	Relevant Limitations
Miss. R. Evid. § 503 (Privilege between patient and physician or psychotherapist)	Psychotherapist	None.
Miss. Code Ann. § 73-30-17 (Non-disclosure of information secured during professional consultation; exceptions)	Licensed professional counselor	None.
Miss. Code Ann. § 73-53-29 (Confidentiality and privileged information obtained during consultation; exceptions)	Social worker	Privilege does not apply to information obtained involving a minor victim or subject of a crime; the social worker may be required to testify in a proceeding regarding the crime.

## EXTRA CREDIT



Mississippi law prevents disclosure of confidential communications made between a sex trafficking victim and their caseworker under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125 based on the definition of “victim” under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(i) together with the definition of “human trafficking” under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(d).



Mississippi law prevents disclosure of confidential communications made between a child labor trafficking victim and their caseworker under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125 based on the definition of “victim” under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(i) together with the definition of “human trafficking” under Miss. Code Ann. § 93-21-125(1)(d).



## ISSUE 6: Prevention & Training

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**Policy Goal 6.1** State law mandates statewide training for child welfare agencies on identification and response to child sex trafficking.

● **FULLY MET**

Mississippi law requires child welfare to receive training on identifying and responding to cases of child sex trafficking. Miss. Code Ann. § 43-26-1(9)(c)<sup>28</sup> (Department of Child Protection Services created; Commissioner of Child Protection Services; department shall be subagency of Department of Human Services; transfer of programs and services under certain statutes from Office of Family and Children's Services to Department of Child Protection Services; employment of Coordinator of Services for Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation; duties; standard operating procedures for investigation, custody and services provided alleged victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation) states,

The Commissioner [of Child Protection Services] shall require two (2) hours of training regarding the subject of identifying, assessing, and providing comprehensive services to a child who has experienced or is alleged to have experienced commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking. The training must be incorporated into the preservice training requirements of all Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services family specialists, adoption specialists, licensure specialists, direct supervisors of family protection specialists, direct supervisors of adoption specialists, and direct supervisors of licensure specialists.

**Policy Goal 6.2** State law mandates statewide training for juvenile justice agencies on identification and response to child sex trafficking.

○ **NOT MET**

Mississippi law does not mandate statewide training for juvenile justice agencies on identification and response to child sex trafficking.

6.2.1 Recommendation: Statutorily mandate statewide training for juvenile justice agencies on identification and response to child sex trafficking. (See [Issue Brief 6.2](#).)

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<sup>28</sup> The text of Miss. Code Ann. § 43-26-1 cited here and elsewhere in this report includes amendments made by the enactment of House Bill 1149 during the 2023 Regular Session of the Mississippi state legislature (effective July 1, 2023).

## INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

“While it is not statutorily mandated, the Attorney General’s Office engages in training with judges, court personnel, prosecutors, District Attorney’s Office investigators and Victim Assistance Coordinators, law enforcement, and prosecutors on identification and response to sex trafficking, including child sex trafficking. In early 2023, the Attorney General’s Office developed, printed and distributed a flipbook to provide such actors in the juvenile justice system information on Mississippi trafficking laws, signs and definitions of trafficking, proper techniques for working with victims, and laws for charging and prosecuting offenders.”

*-Mississippi Attorney General’s Office*

**Policy Goal 6.3** State law mandates ongoing, trafficking-specific training on victim-centered investigations for law enforcement.

● **FULLY MET**

Mississippi law mandates trafficking-specific training for law enforcement both as initial education and as advanced courses of study. Pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 45-6-7(b), (e) (Powers of board),

In addition to the powers conferred upon the [Board on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Training] elsewhere in this chapter [Law enforcement officers training program], the board shall have power to:

....

(b) Establish minimum educational and training standards for admission to employment or appointment as a law enforcement officer or a part-time law enforcement officer: (i) in a permanent position; and (ii) in a probationary status. The minimum educational and training standards for any law enforcement officer assigned to field or investigative duties shall include at least two (2) hours of training related to handling complaints of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children as defined in Section 43-21-105 [Definitions], communicating with such victims, and requiring the officer to contact the Department of Child Protection Services when human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation is suspected.

....

(e) Establish minimum curriculum requirements for basic and advanced courses and programs for schools operated by or for the state or any political subdivision thereof for the specific purpose of training police and other law enforcement officers, both full- and part-time, which shall include a minimum of two (2) hours of training in a course or courses related to the identification of and support for victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

**Policy Goal 6.4** State law mandates trafficking-specific training on victim-centered investigations and prosecutions for prosecutors.

○ **NOT MET**

Mississippi law does not mandate trafficking-specific training on victim-centered investigations and prosecutions for prosecutors.

6.4.1 Recommendation: Statutorily mandate trafficking-specific training on victim-centered investigations and prosecutions for prosecutors. (See [Issue Brief 6.4.](#))

### INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

“While it is not statutorily mandated, the Attorney General’s Office has created a curriculum for prosecutors across the state, as well as their investigators and Victim Assistance Coordinators, on victim-centered approaches to trafficking cases. The training is a three-part program which includes topics such as, ‘Building Human Trafficking Cases with Missing and Intimidated Victims,’ presented by Aequitas, and ‘Working with Our Federal Partners to Combat Human Trafficking,’ presented by an Assistant U.S. Attorney.”

*-Mississippi Attorney General’s Office*

#### **Policy Goal 6.5** State law mandates child sex trafficking training for school personnel.

○ *NOT MET*

Mississippi law does not mandate training on child sex trafficking for school personnel.

- 6.5.1 Recommendation: Statutorily mandate trafficking-specific prevention education training for school personnel. (See [Issue Brief 6.5](#).)

### INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

“While it is not statutorily mandated, the Attorney General’s Office partnered with the Mississippi Department of Education as part of its ‘Be The Solution’ anti-trafficking initiative. This partnership included training for school bus drivers in spotting and reporting trafficking. As a result of this effort, this curriculum is now a part of the mandatory training for all school bus drivers in Mississippi, both upon employment and in refresher trainings.”

*-Mississippi Attorney General’s Office*

#### **Policy Goal 6.6** State law mandates child sex trafficking prevention education in schools.

○ *NOT MET*

Mississippi law does not mandate child sex trafficking prevention education in schools.

- 6.6.1 Recommendation: Statutorily mandate developmentally and age-appropriate child sex trafficking prevention education in schools. (See [Issue Brief 6.6](#).)



## State Laws Addressing Child Sex Trafficking

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1. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.1(1)(c) (Human trafficking act; prohibited conduct; penalty) states,

A person who knowingly subjects, or attempts to subject, or who recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides or obtains by any means, or attempts to recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide or obtain by any means, a minor, knowing that the minor will engage in commercial sexual activity,<sup>29</sup> sexually explicit performance, or the production of sexually oriented material, or causes or attempts to cause a minor to engage in commercial sexual activity, sexually explicit performance, or the production of sexually oriented material, shall be guilty of procuring sexual servitude of a minor and shall be punished by commitment to the custody of the Department of Corrections for not less than twenty (20) years nor more than life in prison, or by a fine of not less than Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00) nor more than Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00), or both . . . .

2. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.3 (Human trafficking act; aiding, abetting, or conspiring to violate human trafficking provisions) states,

A person who knowingly aids, abets or conspires with one or more persons to violate the Mississippi Human Trafficking Act shall be considered a principal in the offense and shall be indicted and punished as such whether the principal has been previously convicted or not.

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<sup>29</sup> Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.4(e) (Human trafficking act; definitions) defines “commercial sexual activity” as “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to, promised to, or received by any person.”

## State Laws Addressing Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

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1. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-29-51(1)–(4) (Prostitution; misdemeanor procuring services of prostitute; felony promoting prostitution; penalties) states,

(1)

(a) A person commits the misdemeanor of procuring the services of a prostitute if the person knowingly or intentionally pays, or offers or agrees to pay, money or other property to another person for having engaged in, or on the understanding that the other person will engage in, sexual intercourse or sexual conduct with the person or with any other person. “Sexual conduct” includes cunnilingus, fellatio, masturbation of another, anal intercourse or the causing of penetration to any extent and with any object or body part of the genital or anal opening of another.

....

(c) However, in all cases, if the person whose services are procured in violation of this subsection (1) is a minor under eighteen (18) years of age, the person convicted shall be guilty of a felony and shall, upon conviction, be punished by imprisonment for not less than five (5) years, nor more than thirty (30) years, or by a fine of not less than Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00) nor more than Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00), or both.

....

(2)

(a) A person commits the felony of promoting prostitution if the person:

- (i) Knowingly or intentionally entices, compels, causes, induces, persuades, or encourages by promise, threat, violence, or by scheme or device, another person to become a prostitute, engage in conduct in violation of Section 97-29-49 [Prostitution; report to Department of Child Protection Services for suspected child sexual abuse or neglect if minor involved; immunity from prosecution if trafficked person involved], regardless of whether the other person can be or is arrested for, charged with or convicted of the offense of prostitution;
- (ii) Knowingly or intentionally solicits or offers or agrees to solicit, or receives or gives, or agrees to receive or give any money or thing of value for soliciting, or attempting to solicit, another person for the purpose of prostitution;
- (iii) Knowingly induces, persuades, or encourages a person to come into or leave this state for the purpose of prostitution;
- (iv) Having control over the use of a place or vehicle, knowingly or intentionally permits another person to use the place or vehicle for prostitution;
- (v) Accepts, receives, levies or appropriates money or other property of value from a prostitute, without lawful consideration, with knowledge or reasonable cause to know it was earned, in whole or in part, from prostitution; or
- (vi) Conducts, directs, takes, or transports, or offers or agrees to take or transport, or aids or assists in transporting, any person to any vehicle, conveyance, place, structure, or building, or to any other person with knowledge or reasonable cause to know that the purpose of such directing, taking or transporting is prostitution.

....

(c) However, in all cases, if the person whose services are promoted in violation of this subsection (2) is a minor under eighteen (18) years of age, the person convicted shall be guilty of a felony and shall, upon conviction, be punished by imprisonment for not less than five (5) years, nor more than thirty (30) years, or by a fine of not less than Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00) nor more than Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00), or both . . .

....

(4) Any partnership, association, corporation or other entity violating any provision of subsection (2) against the promotion of prostitution shall, upon conviction, be punished by a fine not exceeding Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00). If the person whose services are promoted is under eighteen (18) years of

age, the partnership, association, corporation or other legal entity convicted shall be punished by a fine not exceeding One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000.00) . . . .

2. Miss. Code Ann. § 97-5-5 (Enticing a child under 14; punishment) states,

Every person who shall maliciously, willfully, or fraudulently lead, take, carry away, decoy or entice away, any child under the age of fourteen (14) years, with intent to detain or conceal such child from its parents, guardian, or other person having lawful charge of such child, or for the purpose of prostitution, concubinage, or marriage, shall, on conviction, be imprisoned in the custody of the Department of Corrections for not less than two (2) years nor more than ten (10) years, or fined not more than Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00), or both . . . .

## RESOURCES

**REPORT CARDS PROJECT:** For more information on the Report Cards Project, visit [reportcards.sharedhope.org](https://reportcards.sharedhope.org).

**TOOLKIT:** To see how your state compares, visit [reportcards.sharedhope.org/toolkit](https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/toolkit).

**ISSUE BRIEFS:** To better understand a policy goal, visit [reportcards.sharedhope.org/issue-briefs](https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/issue-briefs).

**SURVEY CHARTS:** To see where the nation stands as a whole on a particular issue, visit [reportcards.sharedhope.org/state-survey-charts](https://reportcards.sharedhope.org/state-survey-charts).

## HIGHLIGHTED RESOURCES

### Community-Based Services White Paper



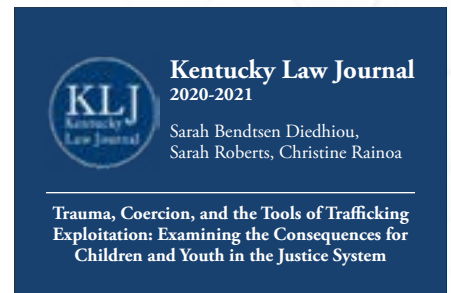
This white paper discusses the importance of providing comprehensive, trauma-informed services to all child sex trafficking victims, regardless of system involvement, and provides examples of state statutory responses.

### Victim-Offender Intersectionality Report



This report examines the phenomenon of sex trafficking survivors entering the criminal justice system for allegedly engaging in sex trafficking conduct and provides tools for criminal justice stakeholders to assist in identifying and responding to these cases in a trauma-informed manner.

### Trauma, Coercion, and the Tools of Trafficking Exploitation



This law journal article examines the harms of relying on a juvenile justice-based response for serving child sex trafficking victims, the importance of enacting strong non-criminalization laws, the intertwined nature of sex trafficking victimization and criminalized conduct, and the importance of using a trauma-informed lens in response.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

For legislators and policy advocates assisting elected officials in creating legislation, request a consultation with our Policy Team online at [sharedhope.org/legislative-technical-assistance](https://sharedhope.org/legislative-technical-assistance). We will set up a meeting to discuss your legislative goals and create a customized plan for ongoing technical assistance, bill drafting services, and legislative support.

## ADVOCACY ACTION CENTER

The Advocacy Action Center is an online resource that allows individuals to join the fight against child sex trafficking either through legislator engagement or by signing a petition. For more information, visit [act.sharedhope.org/actioncenter](https://act.sharedhope.org/actioncenter).



Contact your legislators, letting them know you want greater protections for child sex trafficking victims and increased accountability for their exploiters.



Sign a petition to show your support for issues that advance justice for child sex trafficking survivors.



Help end the criminalization of child sex trafficking survivors! Several states can still criminalize child sex trafficking victims for prostitution. Sign the petition to show your support for changing these laws.