

## PRESS RELEASE

New York State Unified Court System

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## NY Judiciary Launches Nation's First Statewide Human Trafficking Intervention Initiative

Statewide System of Dedicated Courts to Identify and Assist Offenders Who May Be Trafficking Victims in an Effort to Break the Cycle of Exploitation and Arrest

**NEW YORK** – Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman today at the Citizens Crime Commission joined leaders of the state's legal, law enforcement, service provider and advocacy communities to announce the launch of the New York court system's Human Trafficking Intervention Initiative, the nation's first statewide system of dedicated court parts designed to intervene in the lives of trafficked human beings. In New York, human trafficking manifests itself most prominently in the form of sex trafficking. This trailblazing new program targets cases involving individuals charged with prostitution-related offenses in an effort to identify and assist sex trafficking victims, opening the door for thousands across the state to escape a life of abuse and torture.

While there still is an antiquated view that prostitution is a chosen profession, many individuals who end up in New York courts on prostitution charges are victims of trafficking, recruited into the commercial sex industry by force, fraud or coercion. Whether U.S. citizens or foreign nationals, these defendants often come from poor, unstable homes and have a history of sexual and physical abuse.

Embracing a newly emerging criminal justice approach, the Human Trafficking Intervention Initiative seeks to promote a just and compassionate resolution to cases involving those charged with prostitution—treating these defendants as trafficking victims, likely to be in dire need of medical treatment and other critical services. With the collaborative efforts of the court system's criminal justice partners, service providers across the state and other stakeholders, this unprecedented system of dedicated courts will work to identify eligible defendants facing prostitution charges in urban, suburban and rural areas throughout the state, providing these individuals with meaningful intervention and linking them to resources aimed at breaking the cycle of exploitation and arrest. In conjunction with linking trafficking victims to services, district attorneys across the state have also affirmed their commitment to investigating and bringing charges against traffickers and those who patronize prostitutes and feed the demand.

All cases charging prostitution or related offenses that continue past arraignment will be transferred to the Human Trafficking Court, where they will be evaluated by the judge, defense attorney and prosecutor. If there is a consensus that the case involves a victim in need of resources, the court will connect the defendant to tailored services, which may range from shelter and healthcare to immigration assistance and drug treatment. Human Trafficking Courts will also link participants to education and job training programs to help prevent their return to the commercial sex industry. A defendant's charges may be dismissed or reduced contingent upon compliance with court-mandated services and programs.

Other features of Human Trafficking Courts include increased coordination and communication between the court, its criminal justice partners, local service providers and other stakeholders; a single presiding judge to handle all the cases, tracking them through to disposition; regularly assigned prosecutors and defense attorneys; on-site or conveniently located service providers to offer vital support to participants as well as valuable updates to the court and prosecutor; and specially trained court staff who recognize the dynamics of sex trafficking and the challenges defendants must overcome to reintegrate into mainstream society.

Three pilot trafficking courts are already up and running in Queens, mid-Manhattan and Nassau County, with locations in every borough of New York City to be operational by October 10. By the end of October, Human Trafficking Courts stretching from Long Island on the east to Buffalo on the west will be available to serve trafficking victims—reaching close to 95 percent of those charged with prostitution and prostitution-related offenses in New York. On a national

level, there are a limited number of courts in existence that aim to connect trafficking victims to services in scattered jurisdictions or before particular judges. New York's initiative is the first statewide, court-led effort to address the sprawling problem of human trafficking.

"Human trafficking is a horrific crime that inflicts terrible harm on its victims, a form of modern-day slavery that we simply cannot tolerate in a civilized society. We now recognize that the vast majority of individuals charged with prostitution offenses are commercially exploited or at risk of exploitation. By offering vital services instead of punishment to these defendants, the Human Trafficking Intervention Initiative will act to transform and save lives—and in turn, enable law enforcement to identify, investigate and punish the traffickers. Today we are taking a giant leap forward towards solving this vast and critical problem. We know that by working together we can forge better outcomes for victims, enhance the quality of life in our communities and keep New York at the forefront in the battle to eradicate human trafficking," said Judge Lippman, speaking at the Citizens Crime Commission's Milstein Criminal Justice Policy Forum.

"New York's Human Trafficking Intervention Initiative recognizes what many in law enforcement and the justice system are just starting to fully realize—that prostitutes are often the victims of the heinous and destructive crime of human trafficking, and when that happens they need to be treated as the exploited and abused victims that they are. I'm grateful to Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman for providing leadership on this matter of justice and look forward to seeing the pilot courts we have in our area expand across the state. This will be a model for the nation that will hopefully improve the lives of countless victims," said Kathleen Rice, the district attorney of Nassau County and president of the District Attorneys Association of the State of New York.

"Our front-line Legal Aid staff in all five boroughs see the painful impact of charging survivors of human trafficking with crimes when they are actually crime victims. Criminal convictions in these cases can indelibly scar those who have been subjected to human trafficking by leaving them with a criminal record that affects employment, housing, financial aid for college, government benefits and immigration status. Legal Aid staff attorneys, social workers and paralegals see this every day as we represent clients in the model court parts in the Midtown Community Court and in Queens Criminal Court, and as we advocate for survivors of trafficking in civil and immigration matters. By providing supportive services and vacating past criminal convictions, we can literally give human trafficking survivors a second chance in life. We stand

ready to do our part to make this groundbreaking initiative a success," said Steven Banks, the attorney-in-chief of The Legal Aid Society.

"Prostituted women, men and children are routinely subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation, are at grave risk of severe violence—sometimes resulting in homicide—and are likely to be victims of human trafficking. It is groundbreaking and heartening that Judge Lippman, the New York court system and the court system's criminal justice partners not only recognize this brutal reality but are committed to offering our state's most marginalized and vulnerable individuals protection, hope and justice," said Lori Cohen, director of Sanctuary for Families' Anti-Trafficking Initiative.

"Judge Lippman's Human Trafficking Intervention Initiative will revolutionize how we treat women and children forced into prostitution in New York, and beyond. This new, fairer approach will greatly help survivors of unimaginable abuse and exploitation, instead of allowing them to be pursued as criminals. The initiative is also smart criminal justice policy: by offering survivors support in addition to recognizing their innocence, victims of human trafficking will have a path to a better life—one in which they will be much less likely to break the law. I firmly believe this initiative will be quickly adopted elsewhere in the country as the only sane way of dealing with the horrific and persistent problem of human trafficking," said Richard Aborn, president of the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City.