

## Proclamation for Human Trafficking Prevention and Awareness Month

**WHEREAS**, Human Trafficking is the use of force, fraud or coercion to compel a person into commercial sex acts or labor services against their will. Exploitation of a minor for commercial sex is human trafficking, regardless of whether any form of force, fraud, or coercion was used; there is no such thing as “child prostitution;” and

**WHEREAS**, Iowa has seen a concerning rise in labor trafficking cases, particularly among immigrant children from Central America who are often coerced into exploitative agricultural and factory work under the pretense of opportunity, a trend mirrored in other rural communities across the nation; sadly, sexual exploitation often goes hand in hand with labor trafficking, which can also involve illegal arms and drug trafficking in Iowa; and

**WHEREAS**, despite increased advocacy and resources, there remains a stark gap between the number of survivors receiving assistance and the successful prosecution of perpetrators, with fewer than 5% of reported trafficking cases in the Midwest resulting in criminal convictions in 2023; and

**WHEREAS**, despite increased awareness and efforts, human trafficking continues to be underreported and often goes undetected, with the true extent likely underestimated due to its clandestine nature, the ability to hide it in rural areas, and the reluctance of victims to come forward. Studies suggest that only about 1% of trafficking victims are identified; and

**WHEREAS**, every business, community organization, faith community, family and individual can make a difference by working to protect the vulnerable within their sphere of influence; by addressing the problem of internet sex trafficking and exploitation, especially that targeting Iowa’s children. Nationwide, we have moved away from a play-based to a screen-based childhood. 1 in 5 youth aged 10-17 report being approached by an online predator. Note that these are only the numbers reported. In 2023 social media platforms like Tik Tok, Facebook, and YouTube flagged millions of pieces of child sexual abuse material which were referred to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for further investigation. U.S. teens report spending an average of 9 hours a day online, excluding homework time; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Independence, joins Chains Interrupted in their dedication to providing community outreach and education, legislative advocacy, training, promotion of services to survivors of human trafficking, and collaboration with law enforcement; and

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Brad Bleichner, Mayor of Independence, Iowa do hereby proclaim the month of January as Human Trafficking Prevention and Awareness month and encourage all our citizens to become more informed on this growing problem, to be vigilant and report suspicious activity, and to work towards solutions to end trafficking in all its forms in our community.

Signed the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2025.

---

Brad Bleichner, Mayor of the City of Independence, Iowa

For assistance with this, reach out to Chains Interrupted at (319) 364-0222. If you see something that doesn't look right, reach out to the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888.