



TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION

HUMAN TRAFFICKING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has many negative effects on users—particularly children—but one of the most dangerous aspects is its integral role in facilitating human trafficking. There are around 25 million victims of human trafficking worldwide, including 3 million children.

HOW TRAFFICKERS USE SOCIAL MEDIA

- A plurality of sex trafficking victims in the U.S. are first recruited via social media.
- One study found that 55% of survivors first met their trafficker online, either via social media, direct messaging, or deceptive websites.
- Traffickers often search social media for teenage girls, especially those with difficult family lives. Traffickers befriend them, entice them with gifts, and promise a way of escape. Once the girls agree to meet in person, they are abducted and trafficked.
- Another common recruiting method is posting fake or deceptive job postings on social media and then trafficking the “applicants.” This method is most often used to recruit migrants, but young people in a difficult financial situation, such as teenage runaways, are also vulnerable.

Texas cannot continue to allow human traffickers to use social media to exploit the most vulnerable among us. Taking swift and decisive action today against these predators will protect our children tomorrow.



Scan the QR Code to learn more

HOW TEXAS CAN FIGHT BACK

- The government, law enforcement, private citizens and organizations, religious groups, and tech companies all have a role to play in combatting human trafficking on social media.
- Mexican cartels often use social media to coordinate shipments of trafficking victims across the border, so Texas should work to eliminate the trade by actively and aggressively prosecuting cartels and holding complicit Mexican elites accountable.
- Many organizations are offering safe places for women and girls to escape. As part of these programs, they cannot access social media or any direct messaging software — a critical step in helping them leave their life of exploitation behind.
- More broadly, the risks of social media to the safety of our children are dire and just one of the many reasons Texas should restrict social media access by minors.

Sarah Cooper was a 14-year-old girl who was groomed by a predator on Facebook. She says her rough home life made her an easy prey. She was eventually abducted and sex trafficked before ultimately escaping. She now works with the anti-trafficking group End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) to warn others about the dangers of trafficking. Many activists are sounding the alarm about stories like Sarah’s. Lynn Shaw, the founder of a group raising awareness about human trafficking, said of the story: “You have to be committed as that parent, as the trusted adult, to put these filters on your child’s devices. It takes a lot of work and a lot of energy. We’ve got to beat the predators, and they’re winning right now. It’s up to us to be a warrior for our own children.”

