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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE NEWS

Special Kane County Human Exploitation Unit takes down multi-county prostitution ring

Following a 15-month-long investigation, six men from 5 different counties in northern Illinois have been arrested and charged for operating brothels in Aurora, West Dundee, Rockford, and South Elgin.

[Click here](#) to read more.

Former FBI most wanted fugitive sentenced to 20 years for child sex trafficking

ST. LOUIS – A man who was once on the FBI's Most Wanted list for child sex trafficking has been sentenced to 20 years in prison, U.S. Attorney Thomas C. Albus announced Monday. Donald Eugene Fields II, 62, provided sexual access to a child in exchange for cash and other items of value from a friend and co-defendant, Theodore "Ted" John Sartori Sr., beginning when the victim was 14 years old. [Click here](#) to read more.

Man indicted for sexual battery, child sex trafficking in Baker girl's kidnapping

BAKER - A grand jury indicted a man on child sex trafficking and kidnapping charges after a 13-year-old girl from Baker was found sexually abused in a Pennsylvania home. Ronald Smith, 62, was indicted for three counts of trafficking of children for sexual purposes, one count of sexual battery of a juvenile under 15 and simple kidnapping. [Click here](#) to read more.

TAT Senior Director appointed to 2026 USDOT Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking

TAT Senior Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives Annie Sovcik has been appointed to the 2026 USDOT Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking (ACHT), which makes triennial recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation on countering human trafficking in the transportation sector. A TAT staff member has served on each ACHT since it was established as a statutory committee in 2018. Sovcik is the third to be appointed. Former Executive Director Kendis Paris and current Executive Director Esther Goetsch also served on ACHT.

"The U.S. Department of Transportation Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking has been instrumental in helping set the standard for training, policy development and engagement strategies



for furthering the critical role that transportation professionals play in helping to prevent and disrupt human trafficking,” Sovcik stated. “It is my honor and privilege to serve as a member of the 2026 Committee and contribute to the next phase of this important work.”

Sovcik joined TAT in early 2018 and has served as an essential part of the senior leadership team since 2022. Hired at a critical juncture in TAT’s organizational history when focus expanded to industries beyond trucking and model replication began being tested across sectors and borders, her leadership has been instrumental in creating impact, including the training of over 194,630 members of the bus industry through partnerships with 161 private companies, 2,700 school districts and 299 public transit agencies, and the launching of the Youth on Transportation Initiative, which won the 2024 Combating Human Trafficking in Transportation Award from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

She has also played an important role in expanding TAT’s energy and truck stop programs and developing TAT’s strategies for addressing labor trafficking, enhancing awareness about human trafficking during major sports events, and building public-private partnerships to combat human trafficking. She has authored multiple, industry-specific toolkits designed to guide the transportation industry on implementing anti-trafficking initiatives, including TAT-specific resources, as well as joint toolkits published in 2020 and 2024 with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Prior to joining TAT, Sovcik worked as a human rights lawyer for 12 years focused on national and international refugee protection policies and the intersection of human rights and national security. In her roles at the Center for Victims of Torture, Human Rights First and Global Refuge, human trafficking was a central issue in her work toward the protection of vulnerable refugee populations fleeing war and oppression.

A graduate of the University of New Mexico School of Law, Sovcik graduated magna cum laude from the University of Denver with a B.A. in international studies. Her academic work includes the article, “The Survivor-Centered Approach to Transitional Justice: Why a Trauma-Informed Handling of Witness Testimony is a Necessary Component,” published in the *George Washington International Law Review* in 2017 and the article “The Mental Health of Syrian Refugee Children and Adolescents,” published in the *University of Oxford Forced Migration Review* in 2014.

The ACHT report submitted to Congress will serve as the guide for the international transportation community, as well as the United States. The report details the anti-trafficking work being done by TAT and other stakeholders across the country from both the public and private sectors, NGOs, lived-experience experts and organizations within the aviation, bus, law enforcement, maritime, port, rail, and trucking sectors, showing the significant, comprehensive and impactful systems change taking place. Further, it provides key strategies in seven areas that can focus attention and provide clear action steps for a diversity of stakeholders.

These key strategy areas include legislation, leadership and funding, policies and reporting, partnerships, training and awareness, research, data and information sharing, and, finally, victim and survivor support. This approach provides a holistic look at the issue and attempts to address ways transportation can play a role in the downstream and upstream impacts of trafficking through recommendations for the U.S. Congress, USDOT, other federal agencies, states, private and local transportation entities, law enforcement, associations, NGOs and technology companies.

There’s still time to nominate someone for the Harriet Tubman Award

A professional driver hauling a load in the mid-West saw a mother and three small children, including an infant, walking along the highway in subzero wind chill temperatures, without adequate

clothing. He made the call that got them the help and safety they needed and saved the life of the infant.

New York Port Authority transit police noticed and approached a distressed teenage girl looking for her gate at the Greyhound bus terminal and learned she'd been kidnapped at gunpoint in Times Square, beaten, trafficked in multiple states and had contemplated suicide. She was now trying to get home to upstate New York.

These aren't isolated stories. They're examples of people helping those who've been exploited, abused and/or trafficked, and TAT is searching for this year's **Harriet Tubman Award winner** from among them.

Do you know someone in transportation or energy who's made a call, reported suspicious activity or taken action on behalf of a potential victim? Nominate them for TAT's Harriet Tubman Award presented by WEX®. Nominations are open through Aug. 15. If the story is your own, nominate yourself. While recognition is rarely the reason people step forward, sharing these stories helps inspire others to act when it matters most. The Harriet Tubman Award, presented by WEX®, honors individuals who've used their human trafficking awareness training to make a real difference in the fight against human trafficking. It comes with a \$5000 check.

HARRIET TUBMAN* AWARD NOMINATIONS ARE OPEN!

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on behalf of a victim of human trafficking?

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Scan for more
information and to fill out
the nomination form:



*The award is named in honor of Harriet Tubman, the famed
abolitionist credited with using the Underground Railroad to
transport enslaved people to freedom.



TAT makes first appearance at the Texas Trucking Show

Founded in 2014, the Texas Trucking Show in Houston is a regional, trade show for heavy-duty, aftermarket trucking, drawing an audience of between 15,000-20,000 and focused on connecting suppliers and trucking companies.

"Our goals for this show are to connect with drivers, hand out TAT resources, capture any stories related to reports of human trafficking, share the TAT app with them and try to engage them through a commitment activity," explained Heather Fry, TAT Industry Training director. "This activity will allow them to choose a colored token related to how they'll become activated in fighting human trafficking. Tokens include commitments like becoming TAT Trained or TAT training their workforce, downloading the TAT app and talking to youth and/or their community about human trafficking, among others."



Visitors to the TAT booth could choose a colored token to indicate how they'll become activated in fighting human trafficking.



TAT Corporate Engagement Manager Elizabeth Sweetman (R) talks with an attendee at the Texas Trucking Show.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Aug. 4 – TAT Task Force Lunch N Learn webinar: Practical Partnerships: How TAT is Engaging Truck Stops and Travel Centers to Combat Human Trafficking, virtual

Aug. 5 – American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Committee on Materials and Pavement, Richmond, VA

Aug. 5 – Missouri Association of Pupil Transportation Driver Recertification Course, Columbia, MO

Aug. 5 – National Tank Truck Carriers Western Region Safety and Security Council Meeting, Ontario, CA

Aug. 5 – Phoenix, Arizona Coalition Build follow-up, virtual

Aug. 6 – Idaho Trucking Association Rocky Mountain Regional Safety Rendezvous 2026, Post Falls, ID

Aug. 6 – Kansas City, MO Coalition Build follow-up, virtual

Aug. 10-11 – Institute for Transportation Research and Education North Carolina State University Southeastern Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Summit, Raleigh, NC

Aug. 10-14 – The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's North American Inspectors Championship, Pittsburgh, PA

Aug. 13 – Western Arizona Council of Governments – Human Trafficking Awareness Training, virtual

Aug. 14 – 2026 TA Charity Golf Outing, Cleveland, OH

Aug. 18 – Houston Energy Leaders Roundtable, Houston, TX

Aug. 18 – Akron, OH Coalition Build follow-up, virtual

Aug. 18 – Northern Florida Human Trafficking Coalition Meeting, virtual

Aug. 19 – redM Oil and Gas Chapter Meeting, FDP event, Houston, TX

Aug. 20 – C.H. Robinson's Energy Summit and FDP Event, Houston, TX

Aug. 20 – Michigan Trucking Association Safety Council Lunch N Learn, Grand Rapids, MI

Aug. 20 – Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments Regional Human Trafficking Prevention Roundtable, virtual

Aug. 20 – PrePass Safety Alliance Membership Meeting, Boise, ID

Aug. 24 – Crawford-Marion Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition Meeting, virtual

Aug. 26 – DHS/TSA 2026 Las Vegas Security Summit, Las Vegas, NV

Aug. 12 – Southwestern Pennsylvania
Commission Transit Operator Committee
Meeting, virtual

Aug. 12 – Eastern Ohio Energy Coalition Build
hosted by TAT, the Office of the Ohio Attorney
General, the Ohio Oil and Gas Association, the
American Petroleum Institute and
Marathon/MPLX, Cadiz, OH

Aug. 13 – Kentucky Trucking Association 2026
Annual Membership Conference, Bardstown,
KY



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