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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE NEWS

OK pastor charged with human and labor trafficking

A pastor in Oklahoma City has been arrested on charges of human trafficking and sexual battery. Elmer Baca Flores was originally arrested and charged back in April with two counts of lewd acts with a child under 16 and one count of indecent proposal ... According to court documents, Oklahoma City Police received information accusing Flores of labor trafficking and human trafficking. [Click here](#) to read more.

Married couple arrested in second human trafficking operation uncovered by Sheriff's Office

A Baton Rouge married couple were the subject of an 11-month investigation into an alleged human trafficking and prostitution operation before their arrests, authorities report. Maurilio Vargas, 40, and his wife, Zabdi Guzman-Diaz, 40, were booked into the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison on Oct. 13 on counts of human trafficking, pandering, promoting prostitution and contributing to the delinquency of a juvenile ... [Click here](#) to read more.

West Palm Beach woman accused of running human trafficking and prostitution rings with family members

A West Palm Beach woman was arrested last week, accused of running multiple human trafficking and prostitution rings across Palm Beach County alongside her own family. Deputies said 31-year-old Laura Saucedo Torres operated several brothels with her husband and her brother. [Click here](#) to read more.

2025 TAT Champion Award winners named

Each year, TAT staff vote on and present TAT Champion Awards in three categories -- government agency, organization and association -- to those who go above and beyond all of the basic requests for partnership, take the initiative and create new pathways for TAT, using innovative practices that can be replicated with other jurisdictions.

The 2025 winners are the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) for the government agency category, the Alabama Trucking Association (ATA) for the association category and Sapp Bros. for the organization category.

New York State DOT

Presented by TAT Deputy Director and Senior Director of External Affairs Kylla Lanier at the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance fall conference, the award was received by Jonathon Nicastro, director of Motor Carrier Compliance Bureau and the chief bus investigator for the Public Transit Safety Board, for the NYSDOT.

According to Lanier, the NYSDOT “came out of the gate with everything they had, leveraging, on TAT’s behalf, every network, professional association, board and taskforce with which they are associated, paving the way for TAT to share training and resources.” This includes:

- In 2022, having TAT conduct six four-hour law enforcement training sessions for the New York State Police (NYSP) and NYSDOT employees and donating their own speaking time to TAT at the New York Public Transit Association Annual Conference. The following year, hosting a National Human Trafficking Prevention Month webinar for all New York public transportation agencies via the Public Transportation Safety Board, which reached 66 individuals live and roughly 10,000 drivers statewide.
- Adopting all six components of the Iowa MVE Model and adding TAT messaging to all NYSDOT outreach presentations. Assigning TAT’s on-demand law enforcement training modules to all NYSP officers who contract with NYSDOT.



Jonathon Nicastro (right) received the TAT Champion Award (government agency) for NYSDOT from TAT Deputy Director and Senior Director of External Affairs Kylla Lanier (left).

- Requesting TAT create one-pagers for the truck and bus industries to send out as part of their “desk audits,” which were then added to the standard packets going out for new entrant safety audits. Crafting an email about TAT’s bus training options and sending it to all bus companies throughout their state.
- Co-hosting and sponsoring two TAT Coalition Builds to create local networks to combat human trafficking.

Nicastro said, “The partnership that was developed with TAT has been incredible. Commissioner of Transportation Marie Therese Dominguez has led the way to foster my ability to develop programs and partnerships throughout the state and nation to help quell the scourge of trafficking. This award is a tribute to her leadership and our partners at the NYSP, local police, New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the motor carrier community, who have all answered the call of duty.”

Alabama Trucking Association

TAT Executive Director Esther Goetsch presented the award to the ATA at the American Trucking Association’s Management Conference and Exhibition. The award was received by Mark Colson, ATA president and CEO, on behalf of the association.

Goetsch honored the ATA for:

- Being consistent in the fight against human trafficking for over a decade, beginning under the leadership of Frank Filgo and continuing under Mark Colson and Tim Frazier
- Being the first state trucking association to support TAT as a Silver-level sponsor and continuing that support over this past decade
- Including TAT materials in their new



member packets and inviting TAT to speak at their annual conference

Mark Colson (right) received the TAT Champion Award for ATA (association) from TAT Executive Director Esther Goetsch (left).

- Co-hosting Coalition Builds in 2019 and virtually in 2020 to help form local coalitions to close loopholes to traffickers
- Supporting and helping pass legislation requiring TAT training at the CDL school level throughout Alabama and introducing TAT to key industry stakeholders, leveraging their networks for TAT.

“Every time we have asked them to promote a new training or new offering to their membership, they have,” said Goetsch. “In addition to their work directly with TAT, the Alabama Trucking Association has become a recognized leader in their state’s anti-trafficking movement, speaking and representing the trucking industry at anti-trafficking summits and conferences throughout their state.”

Sapp Bros.

TAT Senior Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives Annie Sovcik will present the award to Sapp Bros. Inc. at their managers’ meeting in Omaha, Nebraska on Dec. 12. Sapp Bros. has partnered with TAT since 2015, training their employees, providing philanthropic support and carrying out public awareness campaigns, including:

- Hosting two TAT Junction Briefings – the pilot session in Commerce City, Colorado in 2024, and in Cheyenne, Wyoming in May 2025
- Holding a fundraiser for TAT for one month of each year, by providing patrons with the option to round up to the nearest dollar. Sapp Bros. then matches the amount raised. The organization has been a Diamond-level TAT corporate sponsor since 2020.
- Co-branding and creating a human trafficking awareness training video specifically for employees on how to recognize and respond to human trafficking at their locations. Over 688 employees have been trained to date. They have also co-branded several human trafficking awareness graphics and informational messaging that were displayed in print and on all T.V. monitors throughout their locations during National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.
- Sending Sapp Bros. Marketing Manager Andrea Gavin to sit in with TAT on the Dave Nemo Show in 2024 to speak about the different ways the company has partnered with TAT to combat human trafficking. The Dave Nemo show caters to truck drivers, and Gavin talked about the role frontline workers can play and about TAT’s Harriet Tubman award, which Jessica Chapman, a Sapp Bros. Travel Center cashier won in 2021.

Fuel the fight against human trafficking through an end-of-year gift to TAT

This time of year, many non-profit organizations are seeking your generosity for an end-of-year gift to help them continue to move forward with the goals they pursue. TAT is no exception! Your support in the fight of human trafficking enables victims to be found, freed and become survivors with new



YOUR GENEROSITY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON CAN SAVE LIVES.

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by supporting TAT with a year-end gift!

Now, through Dec. 31, all donations will be matched by Inland Kenworth, up to \$250,000!

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lives, traffickers to be revealed and prosecuted and human trafficking to be diminished, along with the mental, emotional and physical harm it inflicts on individuals, their families and entire communities.

This year, Inland Kenworth has graciously provided TAT a matching grant of up to \$250,000 through Dec. 31. **Please make a donation** to TAT that will have twice the impact through this grant. Your support makes us effective in the work we do through the industries, agencies, associations and organizations with which we work. It results in significant change within systems and freedom and new life for survivors.

TAT plays multi-faceted role in the WIT Accelerate! Conference & Expo

For the fourth consecutive year, the Women in Trucking Association (WIT) hosted TAT at the Accelerate! Conference & Expo in Dallas, Texas.

TAT Senior Director of Training and Outreach Laura Cyrus, TAT Director of Industry Training Heather Fry and TAT Corporate Engagement Manager Elizabeth Sweetman spoke with hundreds of attendees at TAT's booth in the expo hall, connecting with existing partners and raising awareness among new contacts about TAT's model for combating human trafficking.

During the Accelerate! Truck and Technology Tour, TAT Director of Mobile Exhibits Brandy Belton had 215 people tour the Freedom Drivers Project (FDP). Quality Carriers hauled the FDP to and from the event, and seven volunteers from Triumph assisted Belton in welcoming guests and answering questions as they toured the exhibit.



TAT Director of Industry Training Heather Fry spoke at a conference breakout session titled Driving Change in the Fight Against Human Trafficking.

As part of the conference programming, Fry presented to 60 attendees in a breakout session titled *Driving Change in the Fight Against Human Trafficking*. The session addressed the realities of human trafficking, explored how the transportation industry is taking action and featured a peer-to-peer panel discussion. Panelists included Mari Roberts, senior vice president of S&D, Supply and Commercialization at PepsiCo Foods NA-Frito-Lay; Korri Adams, director of Global Vehicle Sales Operations at Ryder; and Brittani Guzzetta, operations manager at T.A. Dedicated. Each panelist discussed how their company is engaging in anti-trafficking efforts, their reasons for partnering with TAT and the importance of industry-wide involvement.

Attendee feedback stressed the significance of industry involvement. Kellylynn McLaughlin, a



driver for Clean Harbors, a WIT Image Team legacy member and TAT Advisory Committee member, reflected on being TAT Trained, stating, “It opened my eyes to the issues I was not aware of, and it gave me the tools. A couple years later, I actually saw something, and I said something. I wouldn’t have done that had it not been for that training.”

The session also included a peer-to-peer panel discussion. Here, (L to R) Fry is pictured with panelists Mari Roberts, senior vice president of S&D, Supply and Commercialization at PepsiCo Foods NA-Frito-Lay; Korri Adams, director of Global Vehicle Sales Operations at Ryder; and Brittani Guzzetta, operations manager at T.A. Dedicated.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec. 4 – U.S. DOT Summit: FIFA World Cup 2026 Transportation Planning, Washington, D.C.

Dec. 5 – Dutchess County, NY Human Trafficking Task Force Meeting, virtual

Dec. 8 – American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Safety and Risk Management Seminar, San Diego, CA

Dec. 8 – National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), Austin, TX

Dec. 9 – National Truck Protection’s FDP Event, Winston-Salem, NC

Dec. 9 – TAT Task Force Lunch N Learn: Targeting Demand, virtual

Dec. 10 – Ohio DOT Multi-State Human Trafficking Working Group, virtual

Dec. 10 – Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force Quarterly Meeting, virtual

Dec. 10 – Brooklyn, NY Coalition Build Follow-up, virtual

Dec. 12 – Sapp Bros. Travel Stops Manager’s Conference, Omaha, NE

Dec. 15-16 – TA Junction Briefings, Phoenix/Eloy, AZ

Dec. 16-17 – Midwest Commercial Vehicle Safety Summit, Kansas City, MO



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