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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE NEWS

Boston man convicted of sex trafficking a child

BOSTON – A Boston man was convicted on Jan. 16, 2026 following a 4-day trial in federal court in Boston for sex trafficking and transporting a minor to Rhode Island to engage in prostitution.

Tramonte Jamier Queen, 26, was convicted of one count of sex trafficking of a child and one count of transportation of minor with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity. In November 2023, Queen was indicted by a federal grand jury. [Click here](#) to read more.

Kettering woman accused of forcing teen into prostitution

A Kettering woman is accused of exploiting a 16-year-old foster child and forcing her into prostitution. Haley Briann Blythe, 25, was indicted Friday by a Montgomery County grand jury for trafficking in persons, endangering children, compelling prostitution, promoting prostitution, two counts of illegal use of a minor in nudity-oriented material of performance and a misdemeanor count of contributing to the unruliness or delinquency of a child. [Click here](#) to read more.

North Texas woman sentenced to 30 years in human trafficking case

A 25-year-old Tarrant County woman has been sentenced to 30 years in prison for recruiting girls into sex trafficking and forcing them to have sex or money, officials said. Emily Hutchins pled guilty to aggravated promotion of prostitution, the Tarrant County District Attorney announced on Monday. [Click here](#) to read more.

National Human Trafficking Prevention Month ensures flurry of activity

January, National Human Trafficking Prevention Month (NHTPM), is always replete with opportunity and activity for TAT staff to engage in educating and equipping the general public and partners with more information and tools to more effectively fight human trafficking.



In one of the NHTPM public service announcements created by the FMCSA, Kylla Lanier (in blue coat), TAT deputy director and senior director of External Affairs, spoke about the role the transportation industry has in recognizing and reporting the signs of human trafficking.

TAT hosted four weekly webinars – on labor trafficking, natural disasters and human trafficking, major sports events and human trafficking and the role of parents and trusted adults in fighting human trafficking – which drew a total of 665 attendees. The webinar on major sports events and human trafficking was co-hosted by TAT partner, UPS.

"Historically speaking, labor trafficking education and awareness has had the misfortune of taking a back seat to anti-sex trafficking initiatives," explained Dylan Wecht, TAT's director of Public Sector Engagement. "We were pleased to kick off our NHTPM webinar series with these resources and materials. Our session, which hosted a diverse group of individuals from both the public sector and private industry, focused on labor trafficking laws, trends, common misconceptions, prevalence and intersections with key TAT partners, and touched on several case studies to illustrate the magnitude of this crime. We received an outpouring of appreciation for bringing light to this topic within the transportation industry, and individuals requested TAT's labor trafficking materials and resources to bring back to their companies and agencies."

Hillary Benanzer, TAT's Research and Project Development specialist, commented on the webinar regarding disasters, "During the webinar session, TAT was able to further equip partners, such as private industry stakeholders, service providers, task force members and public sector personnel by sharing insights on how natural disasters heighten human trafficking vulnerability. Most attendees reported that they live in areas impacted by natural disasters but were not aware of the intersections between disasters and trafficking, so having new information and tailored action steps is extremely important for mitigating human trafficking risk during humanitarian crises."

Additionally, TAT staff presented at 35 events (20 virtual and 15 in-person) to 4,109 participants; TAT received 130 media mentions, including articles, radio, podcasts, etc.; and eight companies used articles/blogs provided by TAT and/or mentioned TAT in their company newsletter.

This year, Administrator Derek D. Barrs of the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration (FMCSA) invited TAT Deputy Director and Senior Director of External Affairs Kylla Lanier to join him and TAT's state agency partners at Virginia DMV and the Virginia State Police to create some public service announcements to highlight the various roles needed in combating human trafficking. Watch the FMCSA/TAT video [here](#) in which Lanier discusses the critical role the transportation industry plays in identifying the signs of human trafficking.



TAT Mobile Exhibits Specialist Micah Larsen was interviewed by local press in Houston during The Children's Assessment Center Human Trafficking Awareness Day event on Jan. 6.

Thank you to Walmart for huge end-of-year donation through their Safe Miles Campaign



Surrounded by Walmart employees and leadership, TAT Executive Director Esther Goetsch (center) shows off the photo-op check marking the donation Walmart made to TAT at their Safe Miles Campaign celebration.

In 2025, Walmart hauled TAT's Freedom Drivers Project (FDP) 24 times, for a total of 17,598 miles. Throughout the year, 36 Walmart drivers volunteered a total of 425 hours with the FDP.

On Jan. 8, as part of their annual celebration of their Safe Miles Campaign drivers, Walmart made a public presentation of their \$150,000 end-of-year donation to TAT Executive Director Esther Goetsch in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

"TAT recognizes Walmart as one of its Elite Haulers," Goetsch said. "Elite Haulers are the name we confer on companies who have been champions for TAT's mobile exhibits by dedicating a large number of needed hauls; providing excellent communication between coordinators, drivers and the TAT Team; and by providing the best overall professionalism and care for the exhibits while in their possession. We are so grateful for them, for this generous donation and for their efforts in fighting human trafficking."

Transportation Research Board holds panel focused on preparing for large events

In January, TAT presented on a panel focused on preparing transportation systems for large-scale events with a human trafficking lens at the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting in Washington, DC.

TAT Senior Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives Annie Sovcik presented alongside a group of anti-trafficking champions and transportation leaders. These included Shamere McKenzie, survivor and CEO of the Sun Gate Foundation; John Habermann, research engineer and program manager at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute; Polly Hanson, senior director, Security, Risk and Emergency Management at the American Public Transportation Association; Jodi Godfrey, senior research associate with the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida; Kezsban Yagci Sokat, associate professor of Business Analytics at San Jose State University; and Marisa Baland, deputy policy director at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

"The presentations emphasized how the crime of human trafficking thrives when it's hidden in plain sight," emphasized Sovcik, "and the ways in which increases in people during major events can allow traffickers to blend into the hustle and bustle of large crowds, particularly as people are distracted by the game, concert, celebration, etc. that they are excited about, and not paying as much attention to their surroundings."



(L to R) TAT Senior Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives Annie Sovcik; Shamere McKenzie, survivor and CEO of the Sun Gate Foundation; Marisa Baland, deputy policy director at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation; and Polly Hanson, senior director, Security, Risk and Emergency Management at the American Public Transportation Association, composed part of the panel at the Transportation Research Board meeting in January.

The discussion around labor trafficking and events focused on vulnerable industries like construction and the work done months or years in advance of major events, like the World Cup, to build or repair infrastructure and the importance for transportation entities to have strong labor trafficking protections embedded into their procurement processes, so they can detect and respond to it.

While there was a great deal of discussion about the World Cup, specifically given the scale and schedule, panelists also talked about the multitude of events scheduled in 2026 – 2027 in the U.S. that will require significant preparation and bring in large crowds.

Additionally, several panelists mentioned various ways they've partnered with TAT, including on the development of reporting protocols, toolkits, making their networks aware of their possible intersections with human trafficking, sharing training resources, hanging posters, etc.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb. 2 – The Pipeliners Association of Houston Monthly Meeting, Houston, TX

Feb. 4 – Hawaii DOT HT 201 law enforcement training, virtual

Feb. 4 – Arizona Moving Association Third Annual Conference with the FDP, Mesa, AZ

Feb. 11 – Prince Edward Island Coalition Build, hosted by TAT and the Government of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI

Feb. 16 – Western Petroleum Marketers Association 2026 Expo and Tradeshow, Las Vegas, NV

Feb. 18 – American Trucking Associations Moving and Storage Conference webinar: Combating Human Trafficking through the Moving and Storage Industry, virtual

Feb. 18 – Alberta Motor Transport Association Human Trafficking Awareness Month webinar, virtual

Feb. 19 – Miami Coalition Build (YOT), hosted by TAT, the Florida Highway Patrol, the Florida OAG, the Florida Public Transportation Association and the Miami-Dade County Human Trafficking Coalition, Miami, FL

Feb. 20 – Colorado Association of School Executives Conference, Loveland, CO

Feb. 24 – TAT webinar: Modern Slavery at Work: Recognizing and Responding to Labour Trafficking in Canada, virtual

Feb. 24 – Seaboard & Armour Transport/Armour Transportation Systems Human Trafficking Awareness webinar, virtual

Feb. 24 – UPS, youthSpark and Clark Atlanta University event with the FDP, Atlanta, GA

Feb. 28 – Truckload Carriers Association Annual Convention, Kissimee, FL



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