



Missouri Collaborative Against Human Trafficking

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WHAT: A new collaboration, Missouri Collaborative Against Human Trafficking, (MCAHT) will support ground-breaking research and develop an action plan aimed at eliminating Missouri's status as a top destination for labor and sex trafficking.

WHEN: The year-long project launched in January 2019.

WHO: MCHAT is a funding partnership comprised of nearly a dozen Missouri foundations. Research efforts will be spearheaded by Andrea J. Nichols, Ph.D., and Kathleen M. Preble, Ph.D., MSW, two leading experts on human trafficking in Missouri.

New Statewide Collaborative Aims to End Human Trafficking

Partnership will Identify Gaps in Services and Develop Action Plan for Combating Sexual Exploitation and Labor Trafficking in Missouri and in the Metro East St. Louis, Illinois.

St. Louis, MO — Poised at the intersection of major federal interstates with access to large cities such as Chicago, Minneapolis and Denver, Missouri is considered a top destination for human traffickers.

Though it is a crime that easily lends itself to social media rumor mills and urban legend, **the newly-formed Missouri Collaborative Against Human Trafficking (MCAHT) seeks to educate the public on the facts**, starting with this one: Missourians are uniquely at risk to human trafficking, one of the largest illegal enterprises in the world.

This multi-billion dollar industry impacts people from all walks of life, but particularly impacts those who are homeless, of low socioeconomic status, with fewer opportunities. Traffickers use force, coercion and fraud to compel our most vulnerable members of society into sexual and labor activities, or involve underage people in sex and labor trafficking schemes.

In 2017, Missouri ranked 17th in the nation for human trafficking, according to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. More broadly, the Midwest holds one of the highest rates of human trafficking prosecutions in the United States, according to Shared Hope International, a non-profit working internationally to eradicate trafficking and slavery.

There are many dedicated organizations and task forces working in Missouri to help victims and prevent these crimes. **But until now, there has not been any statewide, unified effort to pool resources and develop a multi-level action plan for ending our status as a top destination for human traffickers.**

MCAHT formed early this year to identify gaps in services; to connect victims to resources, and stakeholders to each other; and to develop a clear, coordinated vision for ending labor and sex trafficking in Missouri and in the Metro East St. Louis, Illinois.

This project launched in January with a full assessment of the human trafficking problem in Missouri. MCAHT will tap the collective knowledge of social service, criminal justice, government, academic, healthcare and faith-based organizations, building upon existing research and developing a cohesive, evidence-based plan for addressing the problem.



Andrea J. Nichols, Ph.D., St. Louis Community College Forest Park, will lead the research, in partnership with Kathleen M. Preble, Ph.D., MSW, University of Missouri Columbia.

Their work will be broken into three stages:

- **Phase One:** Develop a comprehensive, statewide resource manual to be utilized by legal and social service agencies, to help trafficking victims connect to help. Contact information, program details and eligibility requirements will be provided for: shelters, legal services, language access services, drop-in centers, 24-hour hotlines, counseling and therapy, substance use/addiction services, employment services, food pantries, education and training options and more.
- **Phase Two:** Conduct a statewide needs assessment to identify current gaps in services and unmet needs of key players in the fight against human trafficking in Missouri and the Metro East St. Louis, Illinois.
- **Phase Three:** Shape a strategic plan to be shared with all stakeholders that proposes solutions based on the top needs and collective priorities as identified in the first two phases of research.

Once the work is completed, the findings will be shared with a statewide, centralized organizing entity that will serve the interests of all agencies and providers working to end human trafficking in Missouri and the Metro East St. Louis, Illinois. More details will be released at that time.

“MCAHT was born out of a strong desire to protect every person’s basic human right to grow up free from the threat of sexual exploitation and labor trafficking,” Nichols said. “This research effort will move our state closer to realizing that goal, utilizing all of the talent, knowledge and expertise that has already made a difference in so many lives.”

About The Researchers:

Andrea J. Nichols, Ph.D., St. Louis Community College Forest Park, has more than 15 years of experience studying the problem of human trafficking in Missouri, and is considered a leading expert in the field. She has authored or co-authored six books, five of which focused on sexual exploitation, as well as multiple peer-reviewed academic journal articles. She is the recipient of two national research awards and a regional award for her scholarly work. Dr. Nichols is frequently invited to speak on the issues of human trafficking prevention, treatment and community-based outreach. She has extensive connections in the courts, law enforcement, social services and healthcare systems in the St. Louis Metro area, and is thus in a prime position to engage these stakeholders and disseminate the work conducted by MCAHT.

Kathleen M. Preble, Ph.D., MSW, University of Missouri Columbia, has nearly 10 years of direct social work practice experience with traumatized and vulnerable populations, including refugees/asylees, human trafficking survivors, and marginalized youth. Additionally, she has published a number of peer reviewed papers on the topic of human trafficking, particularly in the context of human trafficking education and the construct of coercion as experienced by trafficking victims. Through her work, Dr. Preble has developed strong relationships with stakeholders in Central and Western Missouri and will draw upon those connections in her work for MCAHT.

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