**Human Trafficking Victims Deserve Action from Congress**

*Marty Kemp, the First Lady of Georgia, leads the charge to end human trafficking in Georgia. With overwhelming support from the General Assembly of Georgia, she has helped with spearheading eight pieces of legislation to combat this issue.*

Human trafficking is a global multi-billion-dollar industry. According to the [Department of Homeland Security](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/CCHT%20Annual%20Report.pdf), human traffickers make an estimated annual global profit of $150 billion. Perpetrators exploit approximately 25 million people worldwide, with 80% in forced labor and 20% in sex trafficking.

Human trafficking, a modern-day slavery, involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to exploit individuals for labor or commercial sex acts. As the First Lady of the State of Georgia, it is my solemn duty to protect victims of human trafficking from their perpetrators and ensure that it no longer happens in our state.

Georgia has one of the highest rates of human trafficking in the nation. According to the [Georgia Department of Administrative Services](https://gov.georgia.gov/first-lady/grace-commission) (DOAS), the FBI has identified Atlanta as one of the top 14 cities with abnormally high rates of human trafficking. This is due, in part, because of Atlanta’s bustling airport, making it easier for perpetrators to transport individuals without drawing much attention.

The Georgians for Refuge, Action, Compassion, and Education (GRACE) Commission, comprising of public officials, law enforcement, for-profit and non-profit organizations, faith-based institutions, and subject matter experts, was created to combat human trafficking in Georgia. In January 2020, in partnership with the Georgia Department of Administrative Services, the GRACE Commission and I launched Human Trafficking Awareness Training for State of Georgia employees and the general public. This training, available for free on the official website of the state of Georgia, equips individuals with the knowledge to identify and address human trafficking.

In May 2022, Senate Bill 461 was passed by Governor Brian Kemp. This piece of legislation adds human trafficking to the list of violent and sexual offenses, making it a bailable crime. Prior to the passing of this bill, perpetrators could return to their victims within hours of being arrested. This bill aims to make Georgia a safe haven for victims and a place of punishment for perpetrators.

However, Georgia is not the only state facing this issue; it pervades every part of the nation. In order to make further progress in federally reducing human trafficking, passing Senate Bill 920, also known as the International Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2023 would reauthorize the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000](https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking/key-legislation) (TVPA), which provides increased protection for trafficking victims, strengthens the government’s protection efforts, and increases the penalties for trafficking crimes. The reauthorization of the TVPA has not been completed since 2018. Also, this new piece of legislation provides three additional provisions to address this issue, First, it would combat human trafficking abroad by including risk assessment and mitigation efforts as needed. Also, it would expand prevention efforts at the United States Agency for International Development by developing activities and programming to counter trafficking in person. Lastly, it would counter trafficking in persons efforts in development cooperation and assistance policy by ensuring that assistance does not result in an increase in trafficking and adding proper protections to the planning and execution of activities.

This legislation was introduced in the Senate in March 2023, and is still yet to be passed by the Senate and House of Representatives before it can be signed into law. It has been taken into consideration for several months, but no specific action has been taken to help support survivors and punish perpetrators. Congress must be driven by a strong commitment to seek reparations for victims and work in a bipartisan manner to continue to counter this issue. They must pass this legislation in order to progress towards ending human trafficking. Georgia has taken the lead in combatting human trafficking with the passing of Senate Bill 461, and now it is Congress’ turn. They must unite with us on our mission: to bring justice to the victims of human trafficking and put away the perpetrators once and for all.