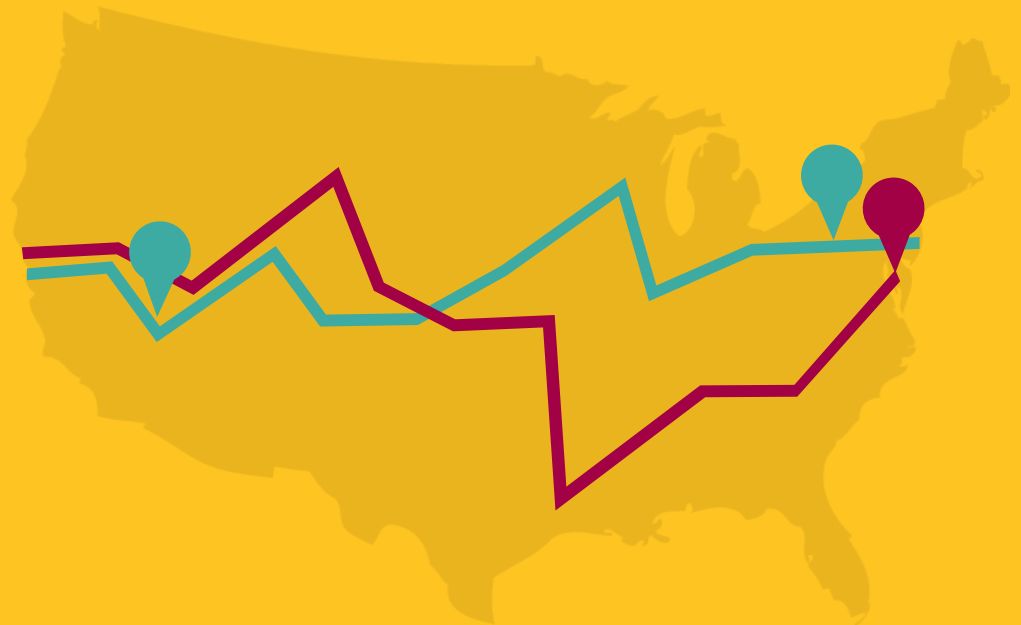




# exploring sex trafficking and prostitution demand during the Super Bowl 2014

“As sex trafficking awareness increases around the United States, it is critically important that we learn about it and explore it before we draw conclusions, instead of reacting to theories, myths or conjecture. How we decide to fight the issue must be informed by research that will ultimately support the investment in innovative strategies to combat what is undoubtedly a terrible human experience.”

—Dr. Dominique Roe-Sepowitz



“The McCain Institute is proud to invest in new research surrounding sex trafficking and large sporting events. A research based, greater understanding of how these networks are operating gives us all a better opportunity to combat human trafficking every day.”

—Cindy Hensley McCain,  
*Co-Chair, Arizona Governor's Task Force on Human Trafficking*

# exploring sex trafficking and prostitution demand during the Super Bowl

MARCH 2014

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**THE MCCAIN INSTITUTE**  
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**ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY**

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The authors would like to thank Daniel V. Garcia, Chief of Police of the Phoenix Police Department and Chief Frank Milstead of the Mesa Police Department for their continued support of Scholar-Practitioner based research into sex trafficking. Their support of multi-disciplinary and collaborative community responses to sex trafficking has proven effective for the Phoenix metropolitan area and serves as a model for the rest of the nation.

## DEAR READER,

Recent reports and dozens of news articles strongly point to the Super Bowl as the most prominent national event where sex trafficking flourishes, with estimates of as many as 10,000 victims flooding host cities to be offered to willing purchasers intent on buying sex. While this has attracted a great deal of attention in the media and has served as a key point in the national dialogue on sex trafficking, support for such assertions has been sparse. While some such inquiries have been conducted capably, evidence supported research on the influence of the Super Bowl on sex trafficking has been limited.

With the support of the McCain Institute, researchers from Arizona State University, and Prascient Analytics sought to investigate and understand the true impact of the Super Bowl on sex trafficking. The goal of this endeavor was to further the national discussion on sex trafficking, understand its local and national impact, and to develop a baseline understanding of regional sex trafficking trends for the 2015 Super Bowl which will take place in Glendale, Arizona. This report is the first comprehensive and systematic attempt to add clarity to a complex, national epidemic. It provides new and useful information for the sex trafficking discussion with the clear understanding that the culture of sex trafficking is subject to many influences, only one of which is large national events like the Super Bowl.

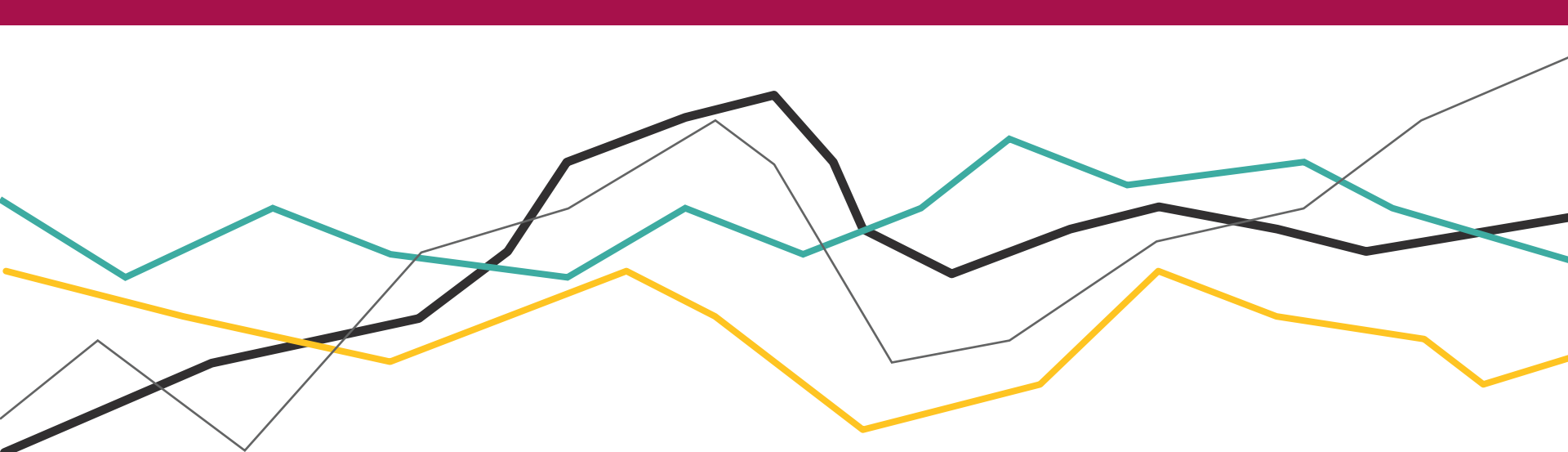
In this study, the authors made a number of interesting discoveries about sex trafficking, but found no evidence indicating the 2014 Super Bowl was a causal factor for sex trafficking in the northern New Jersey area in the days preceding the game. In anticipation of the suspected impact of the Super Bowl on sex trafficking, the coalition of law enforcement responsible for public safety took the necessary steps to be prepared for an increase in activity that exceeded their norm. Both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the New Jersey State Police in New Jersey and the New York Police Department in New York City, the site of many Super Bowl related events, mounted significant investigations into sex trafficking before and during the Super Bowl resulting in the recovery of numerous victims and the arrest of numerous suspects.

The results of this study will fuel future discussions about sex trafficking and major sporting events and strengthen the empirical knowledge about the issue. Perhaps the most significant takeaway from this study is that sex trafficking is a serious crime and demand continues to be the driver of sex market conditions. The sheer volume of illicit activity and potential for minor victims overwhelms the capacity of any single law enforcement agency to respond in a way that would discourage traffickers. The problem is local, regional and national in scope and comprised of loosely affiliated networks of suspects and victims who travel to wherever large groups of people congregate, such as major sporting events. The demand for commercial sex is significant and any solutions to the issue will require a multifaceted and multijurisdictional approach.

Sincerely,

**James Gallagher, MAdmin**  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to provide research-based information to future Super Bowl or other large event stakeholders about methods of research that can help to steer efforts towards sex trafficking prevention, detection and intervention. The findings included in this report are exploratory in nature and need to be interpreted with caution. Through the use of manual analysis and analytic software, we believe that these findings are unique and significantly contribute to the knowledge base about sex trafficking during the Super Bowl that may be applicable to other large sporting events in the United States.

This report is divided into two sections. The first is a report on the screening outcomes of online sex ads for potential sex trafficking victims. The second is a report on a study of demand for sex buying during the ten days prior to and the day of the Super Bowl on February 2, 2014.

The authors of this study, with the assistance of university researchers and local law enforcement, reviewed thousands of Internet based commercial sex ads on a well-known adult services website for ten days from January 24th to February 2, 2014 (Super Bowl Sunday). This time range was chosen to account for the possible build-up and decline of sex trafficking activity surrounding the Super Bowl.

In addition, the researchers placed decoy ads in the geographic area closest to the 2014 Super Bowl venue (northern New Jersey, Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island) and in the Phoenix metropolitan area where the 2015 Super Bowl will be held. Building upon previous Arizona State University research on demand for commercial sex, the authors sought to quantify the net effect of the Super Bowl on local, regional and national sex trafficking in an empirical fashion using source data provided by a leading Internet based adult services website.

The availability of potential victims of domestic minor sex trafficking exceeded researcher expectations with no less than 38 different websites advertising victims who showed indications of being a juvenile sex trafficking victim with at least four websites providing customer feedback or soliciting recommendations on victims of sex trafficking.

While the authors found no evidence indicating the 2014 Super Bowl was a causal factor for sex trafficking in the northern New Jersey area in the days preceding the game, they did make the following discoveries about sex trafficking throughout the course of the investigation:



Volume of ads exceeds law enforcement capability

**1** The sheer volume of ads offering commercial sex will likely exceed the capacity of any one law enforcement agency to respond in such a way to discourage traffickers from coming to their jurisdiction.



Ad volume spiked before Super Bowl and dissipated after

**2** Sex trafficking is a national, regional and local issue that is highly profitable for the traffickers and is comprised largely of loosely affiliated networks of suspects and victims who feed a significant demand for commercial sex.



A national issue, profitable and largely loose-knit network

**3** Research identified distinct victim movement and marketing trends that tend to correspond with the build up towards the Super Bowl.

The conclusion of this study is that the Super Bowl, or any other large event that provides a significant concentration of people in a relatively confined urban area, becomes a desirable location for a trafficker to bring their victims for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. The same can be said of virtually any other criminal offense—the propensity for a given offense to occur tends to increase with a similar increase in victim and suspect populations.



## SEX TRAFFICKING AND THE SUPER BOWL

Sex trafficking is a crime in the United States that has received increased attention in recent years. As awareness has grown regarding the prevalence and violent nature of this crime, efforts have begun to understand the contributing factors including victim situations and customer behaviors. Public awareness of the issue is at an all-time high. A Google search of the keywords “Super Bowl” “Sex Trafficking” and “2014” yields over 10,000 news stories including such major carriers such as The New York Times, Huffington Post, Washington Post, Forbes, USA Today, CNN, Fox News, NBC News, AMC News, CBS News, Time Magazine, Christian Science Monitor and Politico, to name a few. Stories were printed, posted or shown on television in every major city reaching millions of viewers, which undoubtedly increased public consciousness about a topic which most Americans would claim they never knew existed.

Despite the assumptions made regarding the role that the annual Super Bowl events play in increasing sex trafficking, reliable data on the relationship between the Super Bowl and sex trafficking simply does not exist (New York Times, Mary Pilon, January 23, 2014). This lack of real information has brought about criticism by those who say that the attention surrounding the Super Bowl is political in nature and that the increase in trafficking for prostitution during large sporting events is ‘unlikely’ (Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, 2011).

Historically, the data about sex trafficking and the Super Bowl has been limited to a small number of reliable sources and is for the most part, anecdotal. Previous research by Forbes (Meghan Casserly, February 2, 2012) found in the 1000 sex ads posted on backpage.com during the week of the Super Bowl in Indianapolis, nearly a quarter of them mentioned the Super Bowl in the ad text; however, without any framework for comparison, it is difficult to know if this represents an actual increase in ad volume.

Though limited evidence is available, law enforcement agencies local to the Super Bowl venues, have continued to increase efforts to combat this problem around the time of the Super Bowl. On September 4, 2013 the FBI was said to have identified at least 10 initiatives underway for the 2014 Super Bowl to reduce or end human trafficking, which officials did believe increases when tens of thousands of tourists gather for such events as the Super Bowl (Asbury Park Press). The FBI also identified northern New Jersey and Atlantic City as hotspots for sex trafficking during the 2014 Super Bowl. Recent publications indicate that the Super Bowl was indeed a place where minors were being sexually exploited with the reported rescue of 16 youth ages 13 to 17 during a sting operation by the FBI targeting sex traffickers bringing victims to New Jersey for the Super Bowl weekend (FoxNews.com, February 4, 2014).

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## SECTION 1 ONLINE AD SCREENING

This study builds upon a number of other research endeavors by this research team regarding sex trafficking in the United States including the development of the Sex Trafficking Matrix. For this study, online sex ads posted on a popular adult services website *escorts* section were screened using the Sex Trafficking Matrix both manually and using a computer screening program for ten days leading up to Super Bowl Sunday, 2014. The ads reviewed included those indicating the geographic areas closest to the football stadium in New Jersey including northern New Jersey, Manhattan, Staten Island and Brooklyn. Ads were also scanned in the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area to develop an understanding and a baseline of sex trafficking activity as the location of the 2015 Super Bowl.

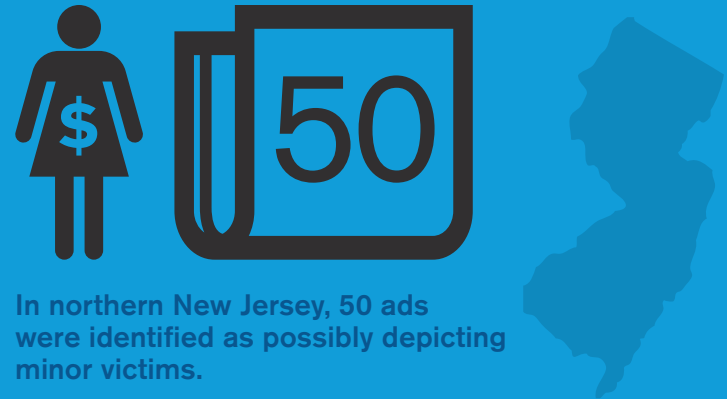
### About the Sex Trafficking Matrix

The Sex Trafficking Matrix was developed to provide a tool for law enforcement to use as a filter or decision assistor when looking at online sex ads and requires the analysis of text and photographs/art in the ads. The matrix was created to detect high-risk sex trafficking ads and has additional questions pertaining specifically to minors. The Sex Trafficking Matrix requires the user to explore both the language of the ad and the content of the photos and other information collected from the ads including phone number, art, and ad placement time.

### Key Findings

While it was anticipated that minor victims would be located among the reviewed ads, what was not anticipated was the extent to which they were advertised. In northern New Jersey, during the ten days of ad screening, 50 ads were identified as possibly depicting minor victims.

In Phoenix, during the 10 days of ad screening, 34 ads were identified as possibly depicting minor victims with duplicate ads resulting in 81 distinct tips of domestic minor sex trafficking. Of the 34 ads identified and shared with surrounding law enforcement agencies, two were confirmed to be minors with one case resulting in the recovery of a



“When a tip about a minor is received, there is an obligation to immediately act. It is typical for sex trafficking investigations to mobilize an entire law enforcement unit to respond to a single tip involving a minor.”



juvenile victim. **Significantly more of the flagged potential minor ads had local phone numbers than the flagged adult ads suggesting that the minors were being trafficked more often by local traffickers while adults were being brought from other areas to be sold in Phoenix.**

In northern New Jersey alone during the week preceding the Super Bowl, 83.7% of all ads indicated the subjects of the ads were likely to be victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

## Network Analysis/Descriptions of Patterns

Sex trafficking is a profitable endeavor for individuals and groups willing to exploit others. The unique players that facilitate trafficking situations include organized street gangs, major crime networks, money transfer organizations, and both hospitality and transportation industries. Through the use of multiple data collection sources and an in-depth network analysis of ads flagged as potential minor victims of sex trafficking, we were able to identify ways in which gang activity may play a role in facilitating trafficking.

Prostitution has long been associated with gang activity (Fishman, 1999), though until recently, very little attention has been paid to gang involved, sex trafficking activity. The increasing gang involvement in sex trafficking has been suggested to be driven by gang members' perceptions that there is a higher profit to be made in trafficking humans and a lower risk of being identified and punished for this crime relative to drug and weapons trafficking (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011).

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“In recent research aimed at identifying indicators of trafficking online, the research team identified examples of gang affiliation and gang activity including tattoos (e.g. “Northside”) visible in photos posted with online sex ads and language used in the ads.”

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 1,276 overall unique contacts (voicemail/text)

  1,457 New York/ New Jersey total contacts

  978 Phoenix total contacts

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“Both customers and potential traffickers contacted the decoy ad. Customers asked explicit details about services offered, and potential traffickers suggested employment opportunities.”

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## SECTION 2 DEMAND RESEARCH

The demand for online sex ads has been a difficult problem to assess as the Internet allows for anonymous and hidden online sex buying and selling. A significant barrier to developing strategies to address and reduce sex-buying demand is the limited understanding of the scope of the population of sex buyers in our communities. This study attempts to build upon previous research conducted by this research team with the goal of increasing awareness about the actual scope of demand for online sex ads to begin to develop strategies for addressing the issue.

### Super Bowl Study: Decoy Ads

Sex buying demand was evaluated for this study by posting two decoy ads in each online sex ad market, northern New Jersey and Phoenix, twice a day for eleven days. Contacts were initiated by potential customers through voicemail and text communication, which was then analyzed by the research team. There was no contact between the research team and the potential customers.

The research team placed two online sex ads in NY/NJ and the Phoenix metropolitan area from 1/24–2/3. Potential customers made contact through a phone number on the ad and texted and left voice messages. Each ad, using a photograph provided by a law enforcement partner, was placed in the northern New Jersey and Phoenix metropolitan area online sex ad markets twice a day. The ads were normative with the age listed as age 22 by using similar language as other ads at that age group with no attempt to draw attention or conceal if the photo or the person being sold was an adult or a minor.

## SEX TRAFFICKING NETWORKS

It was long believed that prostituted persons worked alone on street corners and were making a choice to engage in a behavior society deemed criminal. In recent years, this false perception has changed with an enhanced understanding of victimization, risk factors and other socio-economic influences that compel one to fall prey to the “life.” As law enforcement has come to understand prostitution is very often not the choice of the victim but rather the compulsion of the victimizer, so too must it realize sex trafficking is not simply a local issue. Rather, because of the profit potential due to the rate of demand, sex trafficking must be considered as a national and global issue.

This study traces a clear path of sex trafficking that moves from state to state. During this most recent Super Bowl, what was found numerous times was that a single ad for prostitution could be followed back to its point of origin via an analysis of its phone number, photo and a review of ad content. In fact, over 74% of all ads reviewed in New York/New Jersey in the week leading up to the Super Bowl were found to be connected to at least one other ad or individual, with one particular ad tied to 11 distinct ads/victims. Each of these ads was followed from point of origin (another state) online towards the ultimate destination of the Super Bowl.

Sex trafficking is a national problem for law enforcement that requires more effective partnerships and regular collaboration in order to identify, disrupt and dismantle these criminal networks. The tracing of the potential minor ads from coast to coast in the U.S. also exemplifies the need for a national method for law enforcement to communicate about cases that appear to be local but in a day can move to another city or state. If there is no way to share the collected information on the trafficker, the time is wasted and the opportunity to protect the current and future victims is lost.

This study also shows a clear regional influence over sex trafficking that responds to or, in some cases, drives market conditions. These points illustrate the complexities of sex trafficking investigations in

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“Sex trafficking is a national problem for law enforcement that requires more effective partnerships and regular collaboration in order to identify, disrupt and dismantle these criminal networks.”

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which both state and federal violations routinely overlap. It also illustrates a need for an improved method of investigative deconfliction in which multiple jurisdictions can leverage each other's investigations to assure maximum suspect accountability and minimize adult or minor victimization to the greatest extent possible. **Regionally based, sex trafficking networks are becoming viewed as franchise operations for larger criminal organizations.**

**In order to impact these organizations, law enforcement must recognize what the traffickers recognized long ago: jurisdiction doesn't matter when there is as great a profit potential as there is in sex trafficking.**

The Super Bowl itself does not create the condition in which trafficking flourishes. Rather, it is the traffickers who seek to exploit an increased concentration of people in a relatively limited geographic area that tends towards an atmosphere where recreation and self-satisfaction are common and the availability of discretionary income is increased.

Increased awareness of sex trafficking and its indicators are just as likely to lead to a victim recovery as a law enforcement investigation. Police departments are encouraged to work with hotels/motels/resorts, clubs, bars, entertainment venues and any other location where these conditions may occur or be witnessed.

From this study,  
recommendations for  
the future include:

7. Enforce existing laws against prostitution and strategies that will deter the buying and selling of commercial sex

6. Develop innovative methods to prevent sex trafficking through public awareness, education and dispelling myths

5. Continue to invest in research on demand commercial sex

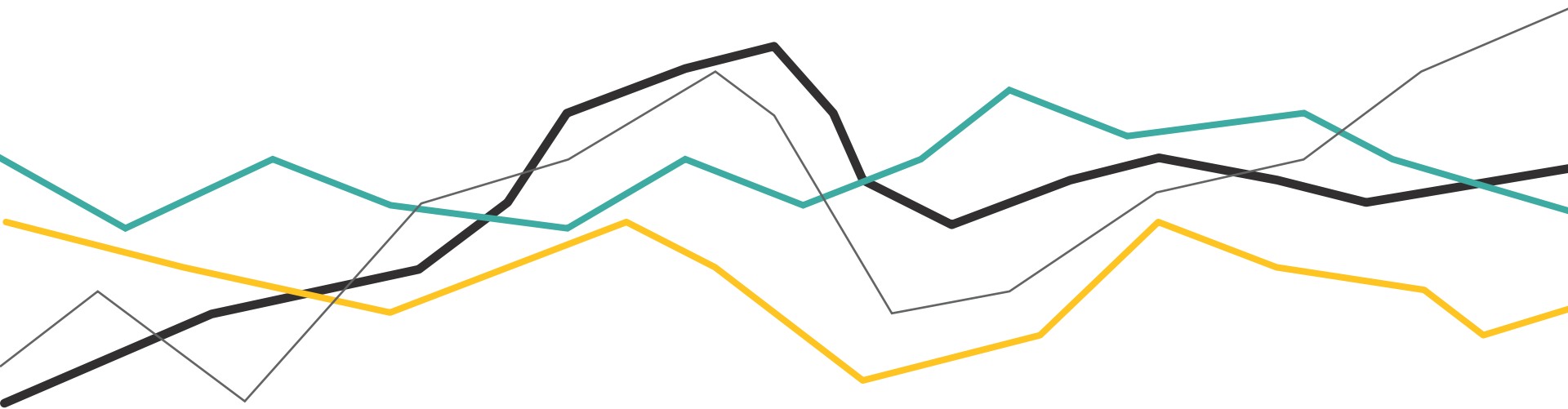
1. Create a national training for law enforcement specific to the complexities of detecting and investigating sex trafficking

2. Support the hiring and specialization of new law enforcement units around the country to focus on sex trafficking networks

3. Create a national tool that assists law enforcement in the tracking of traffickers and allows intelligence from one community to transfer to another

4. Continue to invest in research on better understanding the influence of trafficking networks on sex trafficked minors in the united states





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