



Safe Harbor: A path to empowerment for sexually exploited and trafficked youth

The Minnesota Safe Harbor Law ensures that sexually exploited youth are treated as victims and survivors, not criminals. A framework to empower victims is now in place to help them regain control of their lives.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services works with counties, tribes and community partners to provide safe housing and support for victims. The department also works with the Minnesota Department of Health, which coordinates and funds specialized supportive community services for victims of sexual exploitation, and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, which provides supports and implements statewide law enforcement investigations of human trafficking.

Defining sexual exploitation and sex trafficking

- Sexual exploitation of youth occurs when someone age 24 and younger engages in commercial sexual activity, which is when a promise of or anything of value — money, drugs, food, shelter — is given in exchange for sexual activity.
- In Minnesota, sex trafficking is prostitution that a third person — not the buyer or the victim — facilitates or profits from.
- People of all ages, genders and backgrounds can be sex-trafficking victims.
- Sex trafficking can co-exist with labor trafficking, also called forced labor, debt bondage and slavery.
- Youth who engage in prostitution cannot be charged with a crime for that conduct.

Providing coordinated and specialized services

A key component of Minnesota's Safe Harbor Law is the No Wrong Door response model, which creates a network of service providers who specialize in helping sexually exploited youth by providing housing and shelter, among other services. No Wrong Door also provides training and outreach, and helps develop protocols to support professionals and community members who work with youth. This victim-centered, trauma-informed training helps communities gain the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively identify sexually exploited and at-risk youth, 24 and under, to better serve them. Safe Harbor also now helps youth victims of labor trafficking.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services provides \$6.1 million in funding per biennium for these services, such as emergency shelter, supportive housing, specialized foster care and outreach. From April 2015 through June 2017, Safe Harbor shelter and housing programs served 274 individuals. When including services funded by the Minnesota Department of Health, Safe Harbor providers served 1,423 individuals during this time period.

The department is actively involved in strengthening, supporting and furthering No Wrong Door by increasing available shelter and housing options, improving the child welfare response system and partnering with stakeholders to ensure that youth seeking services in Minnesota have access to them.

Expanding opportunities for intervention

In partnership with counties, tribes and federal agencies, the department recently developed a new child welfare system response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation of minors. There is a separate adult protection system response for trafficking victims who are considered vulnerable adults.

- Child sex trafficking is a mandated report, meaning health providers, teachers and others in a position of authority must report suspected abuse. Child protection agencies now have jurisdiction to investigate all reports of child sex trafficking.
- All reports of known or suspected sex trafficking must be screened into the child protection system as a form of sexual abuse, regardless of a youth's relationship to the alleged offender.
- When identified, sexually exploited youth and labor-trafficked youth who are not also known or suspected sex-trafficking victims will be referred to local child welfare agencies for special services.
- Adult protective services may be offered to vulnerable adult victims of any age if they have been victims of sex or labor trafficking.

Collaborating to create strengthened services

Implementing the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door approach requires collaboration among multiple state agencies, law enforcement agencies and community partners.

- More than 450 child protection workers and other child welfare agency staff in more than 75 counties have participated in sex trafficking identification and response training.
- In 2017, the department's Child Trafficking and Exploitation Work Group relaunched with more than 85 stakeholders. The work group is focusing on developing recommendations on child protection sex-trafficking investigations; screening and identifying trafficking and sexual exploitation; and coordinating with specialized services and placement services.

Offering multiple pathways for help

- Make a child protection report to a county or tribal child protection office, or to law enforcement.
- Report suspected maltreatment of a vulnerable adult including sex trafficking, sexual abuse, labor trafficking or financial exploitation to the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center at 1-844-880-1574.
- Call the Day One Emergency Shelter and Crisis Hotline for victim assistance at 866-233-1111.
- Call regional navigators; contacts available on the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#).

For accessible formats of this publication or assistance with additional equal access to human services, write to dhs.info@state.mn.us, call 651-431-4670 or use your preferred relay service.