

CONTINUUM OF CARE

POLICY GOAL: State law provides for a survivor-centered multidisciplinary team response to child sex trafficking cases.

Collaborative, multidisciplinary groups addressing human trafficking (often referred to as task forces, multidisciplinary teams, coalitions, networks, or coordination teams) have become essential in the national fight against human trafficking and the provision of necessary services and resources to survivors. In 2004, the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) and Bureau for Justice Assistance (BJA) first began funding local law enforcement and victim service agencies that worked collaboratively to combat human trafficking. This response model, which includes various disciplines working collaboratively, is encouraged by the DOJ and is recognized worldwide as a best practice in the anti-trafficking field.¹

These collaborative bodies may work together to address human trafficking at the state-level, community-level, or the individual case level. At the individual level, a specialized multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach in child sex trafficking cases ensures a coordinated response that addresses the holistic needs of survivors throughout the criminal justice and service response processes. Through MDTs, law enforcement, child welfare, service providers, advocates, other professionals, as well as the child and their family can work collaboratively to prioritize the wellbeing of the survivor and provide trauma-informed support and services. The importance of MDT responses to child sex trafficking is reflected in federal law. In 2015, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) required that states develop procedures for providing training on the sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children to child protective services workers in the areas of identification, assessment, provision of comprehensive

services, and multidisciplinary service responses with other child-serving agencies and service providers.²

Survivors of child sex trafficking often have complex needs that cannot be addressed by a single agency or service provider; instead, survivors need support from a number of service providers addressing various needs, including physical health, mental health, reproductive health, malnutrition, substance use, and self-destructive behaviors.² While some of their needs are shared by other children who have experienced abuse or trauma, it is important that child sex trafficking victims not only receive a broad array of treatment but that treatment is specialized to the unique trauma associated with commercial sexual exploitation.³ A MDT response provides a comprehensive, coordinated effort that creates increased capacity to meet a myriad of needs through a specialized service response. Therefore, state law should mandate a survivor-centered MDT response be utilized for child sex trafficking cases.

Importantly, the quality of a MDT response is reliant on some key components. First, MDTs must utilize a survivor-centered (sometimes referred to as victim-centered) approach. A survivor-centered approach seeks to minimize re-traumatization by providing collaborative supports and empowering survivors as engaged participants in the process.³ A survivor-centered approach necessitates that the MDT response process be non-punitive, trauma-informed, as well as empowerment and strengths-based. It allows a survivor to be a key participant in the decision-making process while the MDT leverages resources and facilitates access to services to meet the survivors' needs. Additionally, members of any MDT responding to child sex

trafficking cases should be trained in identifying and serving this population and, preferably, have expertise in doing so.

Furthermore, quality of an MDT response can be enhanced through clear guidance on structure, purpose, and processes. Specifically, state mandates may include guidance related to developing the MDT response on the following:

formal cooperative agreements between participating agencies, the purpose of the team (e.g. coordination of services), mandatory members as well as additional professionals to invite to meet additional needs of a local team, frequency of meetings, and confidentiality.⁴

DRAFTING CONSIDERATIONS: *To accomplish this policy goal, state law should...*

- ▶ Require a child sex trafficking specific MDT response in all cases involving commercially sexually exploited children.
- ▶ Include additional language providing guidance on the development and structure of the MDT response.

RELATED ISSUES:

- 3.1** State law provides child sex trafficking victims with access to specialized services through a non-punitive system.
- 6.1** State law mandates statewide training for child welfare agencies on identification and response to child sex trafficking.
- 6.2** State law mandates statewide training for juvenile justice agencies on identification and response to child sex trafficking.
- 6.3** State law mandates trafficking-specific training on victim-centered investigations and enforcement.
- 6.4** State law mandates trafficking-specific training on victim-centered investigations and prosecutions for prosecutors.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES:

- ▶ [Protective Response Model](#)
- ▶ [Nat'l Colloquium: 2012 Final Report](#)
- ▶ [Defining a JuST Response Webinar: Public-Private Partnerships and MDTs](#)
- ▶ [Defining a JuST Response Webinar: Policy & Practice](#)

1 Office for Victims of Crimes (n.d.) *Human trafficking task force e-guide: strengthening collaborative responses*. Training and Technical Assistance Center. <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/> (last visited Nov. 11, 2020).

2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) *Guidance to states and services on addressing human trafficking of children and youth in the united states*. Administration for Children, Youth and Families. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/acyf_human_trafficking_guidance.pdf (last visited Oct. 16, 2020).

3 *Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide*, OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/1-understanding-human-trafficking/13-victim-centered-approach/> (last visited Nov. 11 2020).

4 Mississippi House Bill 1559, LEGISCAN, <https://legiscan.com/MS/text/HB1559/id/2199335>.