



January 16, 2016

Dear Friends -

Today you gather as concerned Texans to address an atrocious, evil crime that has plagued our great state. While regretfully I am not able to join you in person, I do stand passionately with you in your efforts to fight human trafficking and bring freedom to its innocent victims.

This month the State of Texas is celebrating a new law that I was honored to author declaring January of every year as Human Trafficking Prevention Month in Texas. In passing House Bill 2290 during the 84th Legislative Session, my passion was to bring greater awareness to this issue in order to educate individuals on how to avoid becoming a victim of this horrific criminal act.

Each year, there are literally millions of children, women and men who are forced into human trafficking. An estimated 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked into the United States on an annual basis and the number of U.S. citizens forced into this unspeakable crime within the country is estimated to be even higher. The U.S. State Department estimates that 300,000 children are at risk of being trafficked domestically on an annual basis.

Tragically, Texas currently ranks as the 2nd worst state in the nation for this violent and despicable crime. In Dallas alone, the sex trade is a \$99 million dollar annual crime industry with an average of 400 trafficked teens on the streets each night with a median age of a mere 13 years-old. Sadly, these profound statistics aren't just unique to Dallas, but rather represent a disturbing trend that has no geographical boundaries. But together, we are already changing these disturbing statistics and making Texas a leader in the fight and the beacon of hope for other states as they address this crime head on.

In being a partner in the effort to fight this heartless underground activity and protect its victims over the past several sessions, the Texas Legislature has persevered in making a tremendous step forward in awareness, prosecution, and trafficking victim assistance. Just yesterday, the Texas Office of the Attorney General kicked off their Human Trafficking and Transnational Organized Crime Section, an organization within the agency to better coordinate the investigation and reporting of trafficking.

I also authored three other anti-human trafficking bills including legislation to increase penalties for those that solicit prostitution and persons with multiple convictions of possession of child pornographies, as well as legislation to provide an avenue for innocent victims to overturn convictions of prostitution that they were forced to commit.

However, make no mistake, more must be done to eradicate this problem, and I vow to fight this inhumane criminal activity until its completely eradicated.

On a personal note, in December of 2014, my Denton County House colleagues and I were participating in a public forum as part of our preparation for the 84th Legislative Session. The issues that were discussed included policy matters ranging from economic development, strengthening border security, providing a strong education system, and local control of municipalities. Near the end of that forum, a brave young woman stood up and asked the audience about their awareness of human trafficking. The room fell silent as she courageously identified herself as a victim who was literally sold as a youth and robbed of her innocence.

I cannot describe the passion and determination that further ignited in me personally that day as I had been working for several months on developing policy to bring this issue to the forefront of the Texas Legislature. This is the day I met and connected with Tonya Stafford. She alone shifted the focus in that room from state infrastructure to how we protect the social fabric of our state and take meaningful action against human trafficking.

After the forum, Tonya and I continued the discussion and sharing of ideas. She became an incredibly valuable resource and a voice for the countless victims that need our advocacy. I hope all of you will join me in recognizing her bravery as a shining light in the darkest of crimes. Tonya, I am proud of you as a person, a fighter, and as a passionate resource in restoring hope.

When you leave here today, I hope you will be more informed, inspired, and committed to being a part of the solution. Texas is already leading the fight against human trafficking but government cannot do it alone. We need more people like Tonya Stafford and the It's Going to Be Okay organization. And we need you to join us on the frontlines of this critical fight to save countless, precious, innocent lives.

God bless –

Tan Parker
State Representative
House District 63

State Representative Tan Parker proudly represents the southwestern portion of Denton County. He is also the current Chairman of the Investments and Financial Services Committee. Additionally, he serves on the Ways and Means Committee, the Redistricting Committee and the Select Committee on State and Federal Power and Responsibility. For the 84th Legislative Session, Representative Parker was unanimously elected by his peers to be the Chairman of the House Republican Caucus. You can follow him on Facebook as well as Twitter.

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