



**Alliance To End
Slavery & Trafficking**



Freedom Network USA

February 5, 2019

Honorable Members of the 116th Congress
U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senators and Representatives,

The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST) and the Freedom Network USA, with a combined membership of 80 leading U.S.-based anti-trafficking organizations, strongly condemn President Trump's continued rhetoric attempting to justify a southern border wall in order to stop human trafficking.

This misinformation is dangerous and destructive. As the State of the Union Address unfolds and conversation about a southern border wall continues, it is important to set the record straight so that members of Congress and the American people fully understand that a wall will not prevent human trafficking.

First, foreign national trafficking victims primarily enter the U.S. on a visa, not through kidnapping. In fact, overwhelming evidence shows that our current immigration policies allow traffickers to prey on victims through U.S. guest worker and other visa programs. In fact, many foreign trafficking victims enter the United States through legal means, and once in the country, are exploited through debt bondage, threats of deportation and other forms of coercion. Traffickers also lure undocumented workers already in the U.S. with false promises of obtaining legal status for them.

Second, the emphasis on creating a border wall to stop trafficking implies that victims are mostly foreign born. However, many trafficking victims are U.S. citizens. No border wall will prevent trafficking occurring within the United States. What trafficking survivors need are real solutions: funding for comprehensive legal services (the Trump administration has cut off funding for critical legal support); increased training for service providers to implement victim-centered services; and an end to the criminalization of victims.

Third, the president has stated that human trafficking is the worst it has ever been in history, creating a humanitarian crisis along the southern border that can be solved by construction of a wall. This is inaccurate. Human trafficking and modern forms of slavery affect tens of millions of

individuals worldwide – including forced labor and forced commercial sexual exploitation. However, since 2000, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and related legislation have helped

to successfully build a whole-of-government approach in the U.S. to preventing human trafficking, protecting victims and supporting survivors, and prosecuting perpetrators. This administration has already begun to roll back access to critical protections like the T Visa, asylum protections for those fleeing traffickers, and access to legal services for trafficking survivors. Building a border wall risks diverting even more funding and support away from long-established programs and policies that work.

As a member of Congress, you have an opportunity and the responsibility to help correct the president's misleading narrative during your interactions with constituents and the news media. Instilling fear to justify a border wall is damaging to long-term efforts to prevent human trafficking. If unchallenged, and if resources are diverted, this will only embolden traffickers to continue their exploitation of victims. If Congress is truly interested in reducing the vulnerability of foreign victims of trafficking on U.S. soil, we stand ready to work together on real comprehensive immigration reform that will put migrant rights at the forefront of prevention efforts to stop trafficking. That could be a critical step in truly preventing human trafficking in our own backyard.

We ask that you join with us and call on the Trump administration to cease using the tragic crime of human trafficking as a reason to influence the American people to support a border wall.

Sincerely,

ATEST - The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking
Freedom Network USA

The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST) is a U.S. based coalition that advocates for solutions to prevent and end all forms of human trafficking and modern slavery around the world. ATEST advocates for lasting solutions to prevent labor and sex trafficking, hold perpetrators accountable, ensure justice for victims and empower survivors with tools for recover. ATEST's collective experience implementing programs at home and abroad provides the coalition with unparalleled breadth and depth of expertise. ATEST member organizations include: Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), Free the Slaves, Human Trafficking Institute, National Network for Youth (NN4Y), Polaris, Safe Horizon, Solidarity Center, T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, United Way Worldwide, Verité, and Vital Voices Global Partnership. (www.endslaveryandtrafficking.org)

Freedom Network USA, established in 2001, is a coalition of 68 non-governmental organizations and individuals that provide services to, and advocate for the rights of, trafficking survivors in the U.S. Cumulatively, our members serve over 2,000 survivors of human trafficking in the U.S each year. As the largest network of providers working directly with trafficking survivors in the U.S, we are uniquely situated to evaluate the impact of U.S government efforts to address human trafficking, identify challenges, and propose solutions. (www.freedomnetworkusa.org)