

**For Immediate Release:** January 14, 2012  
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## **Child-serving Agencies Send the Florida Legislature Blue Ribbons to Wear in Support of the State's Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts**

*Officials recognize Human Trafficking Awareness Month*

**Tallahassee** -- The Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) will distribute navy blue ribbons to all members of the Florida Legislature this week in observance of Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Navy blue has been designated as the national color for human trafficking awareness.

"With human trafficking as the fastest growing criminal enterprise and Florida as one of the most attractive destinations by predators, the need for actions is here and now," said DJJ Secretary Wansley Walters, chair of the Human Trafficking Workgroup of the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet. "I will proudly wear the navy blue ribbon as a symbol of my commitment to protecting Florida youth from the predators who view our children as nothing more than opportunities for their own financial gain."

The ribbons are attached to cards describing human trafficking and how legislators can help. The cards are signed by APD Director Barbara Palmer, DCF Secretary David Wilkins and DJJ Secretary Wansley Walters and read: "Human trafficking is a form of modern day slavery; be it for commercialized sexual or labor exploitation. This crime does not have a static profile. It affects children, adults, U.S. citizens, residents, and foreign nationals alike. More specifically, it affects Florida's most vulnerable population: children. From January to October 2012, 546 Florida children were reported as potential victims of human trafficking to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Florida Abuse Hotline and more than 184 U.S. trafficked minors have received services through DCF. Florida has passed legislation that provides greater penalties for perpetrators of child sex trafficking and helps protect exploited children. The Department of Children & Families, Department of Juvenile Justice, and Agency for Persons with Disabilities are committed to continuing to work with the Legislature and the Attorney General to address this growing problem in our state."

Gov. Rick Scott has proclaimed January as Human Trafficking Awareness Month in Florida. Additionally, the following counties and cities signed their own proclamations:

- Broward County
- Lake County
- Miami-Dade County
- Marion County
- City of Bunnell
- City of Callaway
- City of Dunedin
- City of Lynn Haven
- City of Ocala

- City of Palatka
- City of Parker
- Panama City
- Panama City Beach

Click [here](#) to read the proclamation.

“The navy blue ribbon symbolizes my commitment to doing my part to ensure the people of Florida have every possible protection from the horrifying practice of human trafficking,” said state Rep. Matt Gaetz. “I commend Secretary Walters, Secretary Wilkins and Director Palmer on their efforts to abolish human trafficking and offer my support on this very important issue.”

Human trafficking is a form of modern day slavery and is a crime against humanity that violates the most basic human rights and deprives victims of their freedom. It occurs when a person is recruited, harbored, obtained, or exported through force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labor, involuntary servitude, debt bondage and other methods of slavery.

"In the past two years, we have investigated more than 1,000 allegations of human trafficking involving the sexual exploitation of children," said Department of Children and Families Secretary David Wilkins. "The new laws passed last year that toughen penalties for criminals involved in this horrible crime and provide better services to victims have made Florida a national leader in the fight against human trafficking."

Human trafficking affects more than 27 million people worldwide, including an estimated two million children who are trafficked for child labor and sexual exploitation.

"Unfortunately, human trafficking has become a problem in our state. Many Floridians with disabilities are extremely vulnerable and may be exploited. Some people with developmental disabilities may be manipulated and coerced into being sexually abused. They may not fully understand that they are being used in situations of sexual abuse or prostitution. The state of Florida is committed to preventing all types of abuse and exploitation of vulnerable citizens," said APD Director Barbara Palmer.

Communities across the state are also hosting events to raise awareness about the dangers of human trafficking and the steps each Florida residents can take to protect themselves and their family. To view the list of statewide human trafficking events, visit [bit.ly/WEkk4F](http://bit.ly/WEkk4F).