

Combating Human Trafficking in Nebraska

Task Force Review 2020
Nebraska Attorney General's Office



Nebraska
Human Trafficking
TASK FORCE



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The year 2020 has produced significant advancement in the fight against human trafficking in Nebraska. Across the state, members of the NHTTF met through virtual meetings as an expanded Task Force, witnessed a rise in trafficking cases and marked increases in prosecutions of human trafficking.

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A Year of Transition

2020 began a new era in the task force. The fight against human trafficking in Nebraska started much earlier, two decades ago. The history is outlined in our 2019 report entitled *Combating Human Trafficking in Nebraska – Task Force Review*. Starting in January of 2020, we restructured the task force to concentrate on finding and stopping human trafficking while always recognizing victims and survivors. Here is our newly defined three-fold goal:

NHTTF Goals



FIND
human trafficking
in Nebraska

Targeted investigations, proactive operations, data analysis, and communication among task force partners.



STOP
traffickers

Arrest and prosecute, forfeiture of assets used in human trafficking, dismantle any human trafficking enterprise, otherwise combat trafficking.



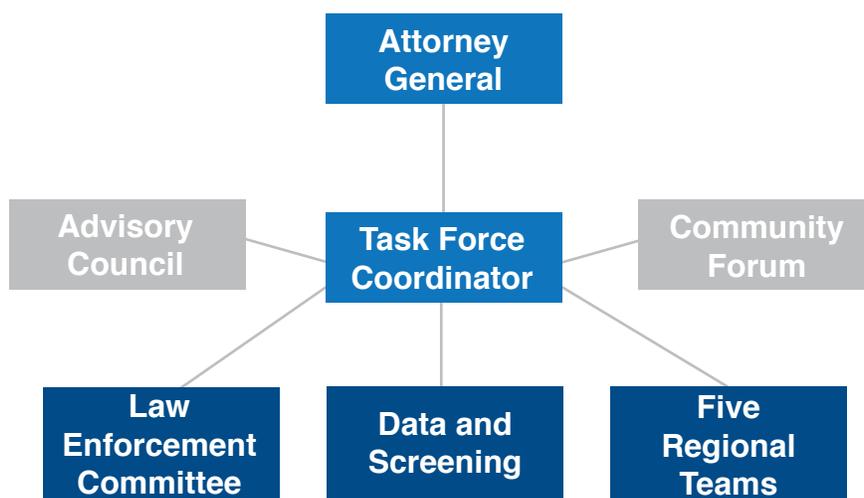
RECOGNIZE
each victim

A trauma-informed approach and referrals to trauma-informed, client-centered services.

Service Providers Form PATH

This change in structure required adjustments. The biggest practical effect involved the relationship between the task force and the partners who primarily focus on serving survivors. As NHTTF focuses its efforts on finding and stopping human trafficking, service providers, who provide a key role in addressing the needs of victims, are now no longer organized under NHTTF. In the transition, a newly formed group – Nebraska Partnership Against the Trafficking of Humans, or NE PATH – began filling that role. The same participants, with some additions, continue the work done earlier now under a new banner.

Structure of NHTTF



From NHTTF’s inception in 2015 until the end of 2019, the Salvation Army coordinated the services side of the task force. It also ran its anti-trafficking SAFE-T program, which included fielding all calls from the National Human Trafficking Hotline concerning possible victims in Nebraska. It also provided a 24/7 line to discuss with law enforcement the care of newly discovered victims at any time of the day or night. In August 2020, the Salvation Army announced its decision to restructure its SAFE-T program, eliminating five positions and its system to handle the hotline calls.

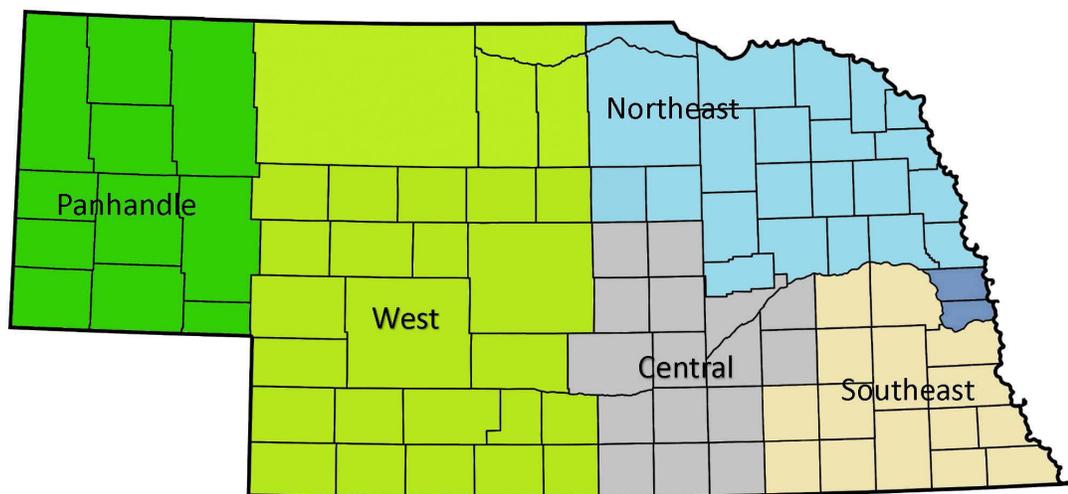
Immediately, and in communication with many NHTTF partners, the Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence and the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers organized an alternate method to field these calls. While some transition adjustments continue, the gap is filled. Once again, trained experts are answering these calls.

While victim services partners are organized separately, they still remain active members of the regional teams. Victim advocates continue to help law enforcement respond to trafficking situations that involve victims. Hospitals, schools, probation officers still see signs of human trafficking and alert the team to help us uncover this crime, now more than ever. Victim advocates continue to play a role throughout the prosecution process, focusing on the survivor/witness and keeping him/her informed throughout it all.

Greater Participation in the Regional Teams

NHTTF's five regional teams carry out the work on the ground. They conduct proactive operations across the state that uncover human trafficking, stop traffickers, and provide immediate assistance to victims. The teams also investigate tips from Nebraska citizens.

The Five NHTTF Regions

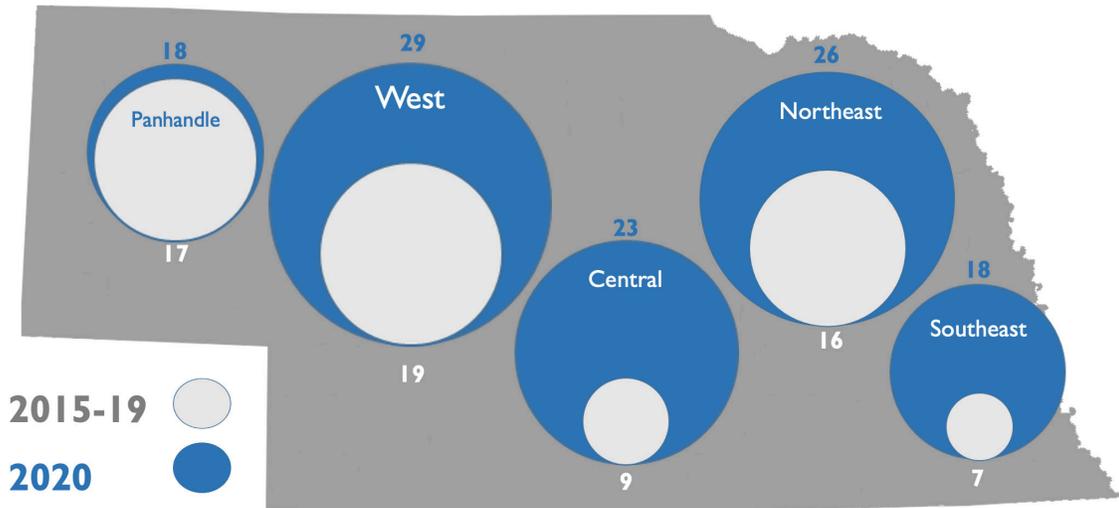


The membership in the regional teams increased by 46 agencies – a 68% increase over 2019. This two-thirds increase is an encouraging sign of a working structure to fight human trafficking together. This comes from a unity of purpose. NHTTF is a group of agencies and organizations committed to adding this work to their other duties because of its importance. The participation rate this year illustrates the local collaboration across the state.

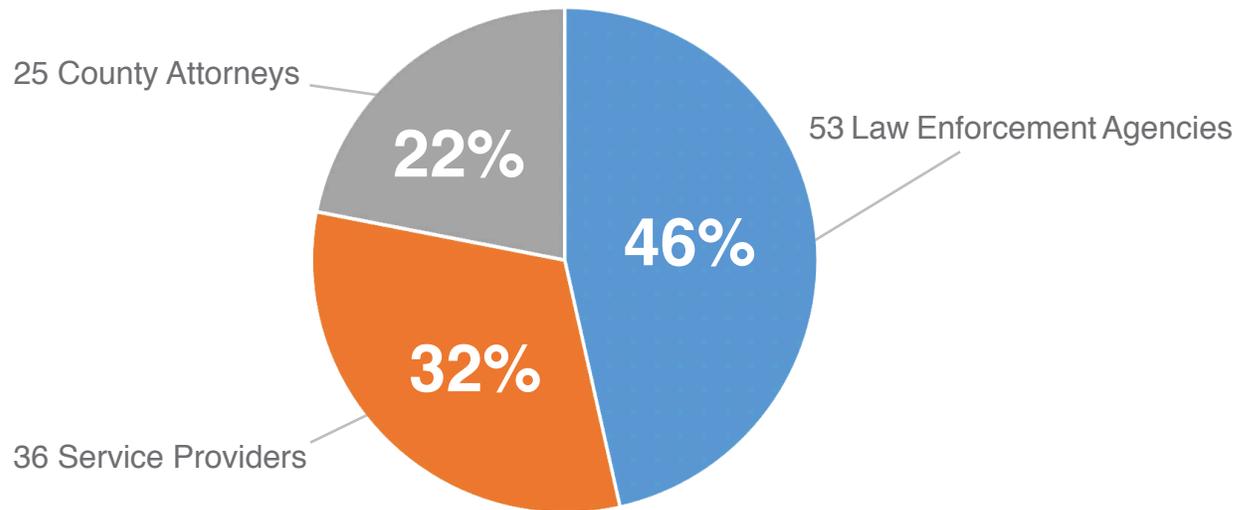
Regional teams conduct most of the actual work of the task force. While we have some statewide committees that do important big-picture work, it is the regional team who responds to tips about human trafficking and who plans the proactive operations.

The map and graph show the significant increase in the number of MoUs signed in this, NHTTF's fifth year. (These MoUs are the formal way to join a regional team.) These numbers reflect the general participation in the actual meetings as well. Typically, each region team meets every two or three months. Because of COVID, most meetings were hosted virtually this year, but the participation remained high.

Memorandums of Understanding in 2020



Regional Teams MoUs



Prosecutions & Convictions Grew

The year 2020 saw a substantial increase in the number of human trafficking cases, flowing not only from task force activity but from all enforcement efforts across the state. Twenty-two prosecutions of human trafficking began in state court in 2020. Additionally, in federal court the US Attorney's Office for the District of Nebraska charged 12 other individuals with a variety of human-trafficking-related crimes this year.

Detection and Enforcement

23

proactive
operations
to date

57

new investigations
in 2020

192

total human trafficking
investigations in
Nebraska

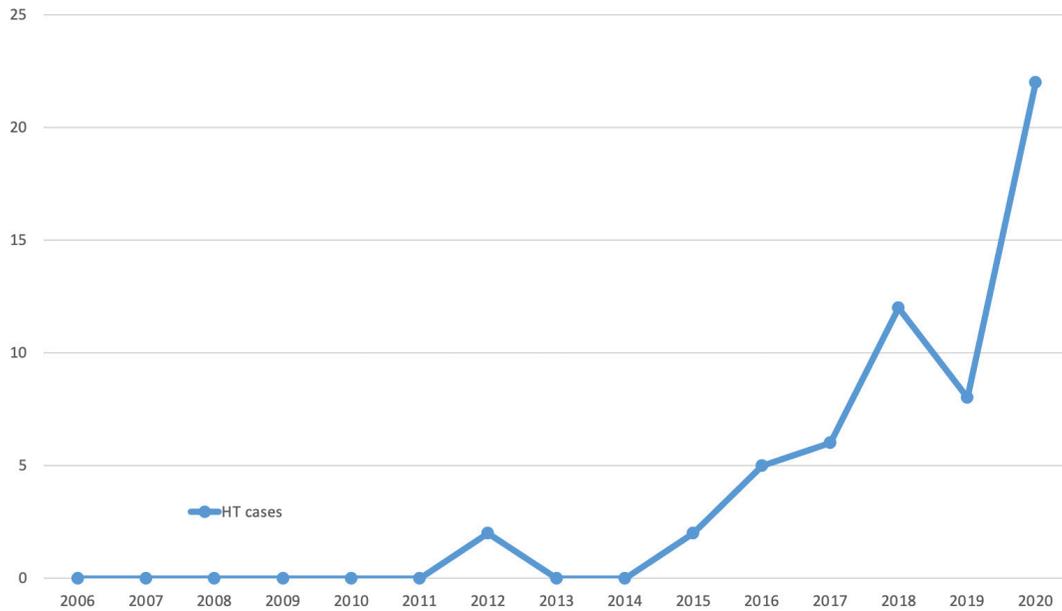
57

human trafficking
prosecutions statewide
under state law

33 convictions
17 for human trafficking
1 acquittal
1 moved to federal court
6 records sealed
16 pending

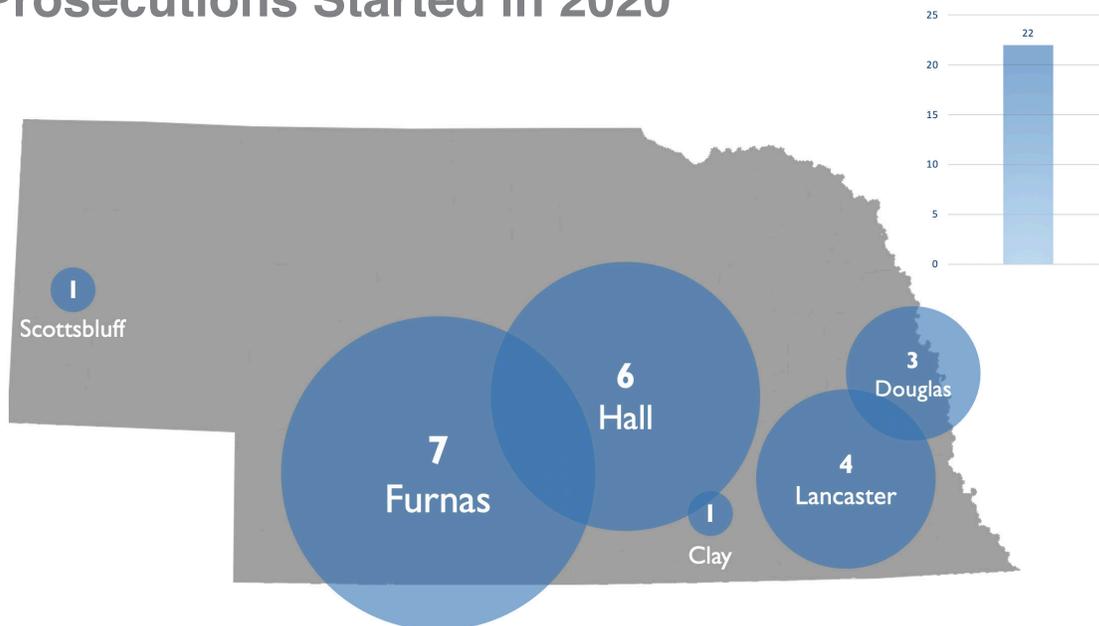
The results of Nebraska's efforts against human trafficking, including NHTTF and other agencies. We also worked closely with the US Attorney's Office, Homeland Security Investigations, and the FBI.

Human Trafficking Prosecutions



Once important human trafficking legislation went into effect, providing law enforcement and prosecutors strengthened ability to investigate and prosecute, there has been a significant increase in prosecutions and convictions in Nebraska.

Prosecutions Started in 2020



Trainings for Strategic Groups

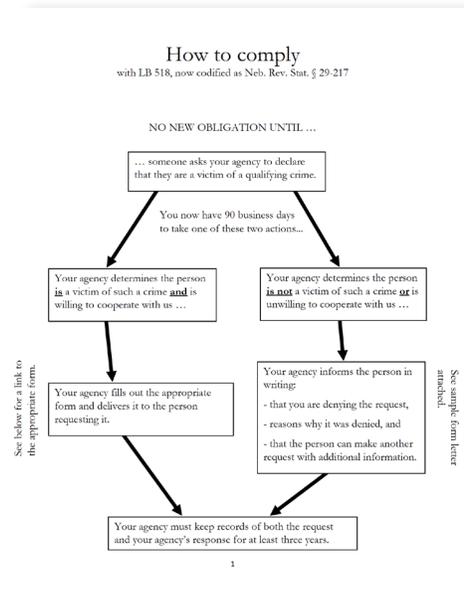
In spite of the challenges this year, NHTTF Coordinator Glen Parks and NHTTF Investigator Anna Brewer provided combined almost 30 hours of instruction and trained over 700 people. Often, these sessions provided sector-specific instruction on human trafficking in Nebraska. The trainings included strategic groups, such as police recruits, Big Brothers Big Sisters staff, Nebraska paralegals, schools' staff, and Nebraska's appellate judges.

Legislation Relating to Human Trafficking

In 2020, the Unicameral passed LB518. It requires certain government agencies to respond promptly to any request for assistance in getting a T- or U-visa. These visas are available to foreign nationals who are victims of violent crimes, including human trafficking. The visa normalizes their residency status in the United States and allows them to work and receive government benefits.

However, before issuing these visas, Homeland Security needs to verify the applicant is actually a victim, and it relies on local law enforcement or prosecutors for this task. As a result, applicants may ask for a certification from these local government officials.

This new Nebraska law requires an office to respond with a yes or a no within 90 business days of such a request. This duty applies to all local law enforcement agencies, county attorneys, the state patrol, and the AG's Office. NHTTF created a handbook to help explain this new law, which we emailed to each sheriff, police chief, and county attorney in the state. (See a page from it shown here.) In the guide, we remind law enforcement that the T-visa and U-visa are really law enforcement tools, created in part to help the victim-witnesses stay and work safely in the country while remaining available to testify when we prosecute the trafficker or the perpetrator of the violent crime.



History of Nebraska Laws

Addressing Human Trafficking

