

April 21, 2025

For immediate release

Contact: [Kathryn Ramey] [\[843-743-9560\]](tel:843-743-9560)

[\[kjramey@tricountyhttf.org\]](mailto:kjramey@tricountyhttf.org)

## **New Legislation Seeks to Better Identify Victims of Human Trafficking**

**CHARLESTON, S.C.** – Representative Spencer Wetmore, together with the Tri-County Human Trafficking Task Force, Solicitors Scarlett Wilson and David Pascoe, and Sheriffs Carl Ritchie, Duane Lewis, and Sam Richardson, has proposed new legislation to the South Carolina State House that would require training for medical professionals regarding human trafficking.

Established in 2018, the Tri-County Human Trafficking Task Force uses prevention, prosecution, protection, and partnerships to implement a coordinated community response against sex and labor trafficking. Equipping medical professionals with the knowledge and tools they need to identify and treat these victims is a priority goal for the task force. Erin Hart, a nurse and co-chair of the Task Force's Healthcare Subcommittee reports that, "Human Trafficking victims utilize healthcare for a variety of reasons. Research shows that over 85% of victims will seek medical attention during their victimization. This places healthcare professionals at the forefront of identification and intervention for trafficking victims. Many healthcare professionals report the primary barrier in identifying and treating these patients is a lack of knowledge and training about trafficking. It is imperative that we, as healthcare providers, have the knowledge and resources available to identify and properly care for these patients."

Academic research also supports this goal. According to Professor Leslie Hill, co-chair of the Tri-County Task Force's Research / Data Subcommittee, "Research solidly indicates that most human trafficking victims seek medical care at some point during their trafficking experience. Thus, it is vitally important to educate healthcare providers about this misunderstood crime, as this may be the victim's only opportunity to be identified."

Sheriff Duane Lewis of the Berkeley County Sheriff's Office emphasized the importance of the proposed legislation, stating, "This legislation is a critical step in helping us identify and protect victims of human trafficking. Oftentimes, victims suffer in silence. By equipping medical professionals with the right training, we're giving victims a chance to be seen, heard, and ultimately saved."

Spencer Wetmore is the lead sponsor of the legislation

[https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess126\\_2025-2026/bills/4343.htm](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess126_2025-2026/bills/4343.htm)

and believes this is an important step towards battling this tragic reality in our state. The bill would not increase overall education requirements for medical professionals, but simply direct that one hour of the existing training for front-line medical professionals be dedicated to this important subject.

-###-

## Sources Cited:

Rollins, R., Gribble, A., Barrett, S., and Powell, C. “Who Is in Your Waiting Room? Health Care Professionals as Culturally Responsive and Trauma-Informed First Responders to Human Trafficking”

*AMA J Ethics*. 2017;19(1):63-71. doi: 10.1001/journalofethics.2017.19.1.pfor2-1701.

Garg, A., Panda, P., Neudecker, M., Lee, S. (2020) Barriers to the access and utilization of healthcare for trafficked youth: A systematic review, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Volume 100, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104137>.

Laura J. Lederer & Christopher A. Wetzel *The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities*, 23 *Annals Health L*. 61 (2014).

Available at: <https://lawecommons.luc.edu/annals/vol23/iss1/5>

Shadowen, C., Beaverson, S. and Rigby, F.B. (2021) "Human Trafficking Education for Emergency Department Providers." *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 17, 38-55, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201221173>.

Chisolm-Straker, M. et al.(2016) "Health Care and Human Trafficking: We are seeing the unseen." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 27 (3), 1220–

1233, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2016.0131>