

DRIVER SAFETY LETTER



Fighting Human Trafficking

June 2023

Every year, millions of people are held against their will and trafficked into forced labor and commercial sex. While on the road, you could be the key to their freedom. Globally, an estimated 28 million people are currently subjected to human trafficking as well as in every U.S. state. Human trafficking is a crime that involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain labor or commercial sex acts.

Victims can be anyone—regardless of race, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, education level, or citizenship status. Similarly, perpetrators of this crime can also vary. Traffickers can be family members, partners, acquaintances or strangers. They can act alone or as part of an organized criminal enterprise.

Language barriers or fear of their traffickers often keep victims from seeking help—making human trafficking a crime hidden in plain sight. Human trafficking victims are often overlooked because people do not recognize the signs of human trafficking.

To help combat the human trafficking epidemic, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) recently launched its new human trafficking awareness campaign — “Your Roads, Their Freedom.” The campaign seeks to give the nation’s 8.7 million commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers the information needed to identify and report suspected human trafficking.

Recognizing the indicators of human trafficking is the first step in identifying potential victims. Human traffickers often use transportation systems to recruit and move victims. Bus stations, truck stops, rest areas, and transit centers are often places where human trafficking can occur.

When drivers know what to look for, they can serve as a community's eyes, ears and voice. When you see indicators of human trafficking, report your suspicion. You could help someone find their road to freedom. When at transit stations, on the move, stopping for gas, at rest stops, or at your destination, ask yourself the questions below when presented with a potential trafficking situation. Note that all indicators listed below are not present in every human trafficking situation and the presence or absence of any of the indicators is not necessarily proof of human trafficking. If you notice something, don't dismiss the feeling. Trust your instincts.

- **Is the person in possession of their own identification, cash/payment cards, and/or travel documents?**

Traffickers often control victims' identification and travel documents. Similarly, victims might also defer to their trafficker or someone else with them who seems to be in control of the trafficking situation. For example, a trafficker may be in complete control of a victim's cash or debit/credit cards, and the victim may defer to their trafficker to pay for something as simple as a bottle of water.

- **Is the person being told not to speak or appearing coached on what to say?**

Traffickers often communicate on behalf of their victims or coach their victims on what to say to community members, employees, law enforcement, and other officials.

- **Does the person lack knowledge or logical means of reaching their final destination?**

When in a situation where the trafficker purchases travel for a victim, victims will often arrive to obtain their ticket and lack knowledge or logical means to get to their final destination (e.g., no cash, use of prepaid credit cards/paid for before arrival, or not knowing the name of the person who booked their

travel/who they are going to visit). They might also be wearing clothing that is unsuitable for the season or inappropriate for their final destination.

- **Is there a suspicious vehicle parked in an unusual location or often dropping off/picking up individual(s) at other vehicles/trucks?**

Trucks come and go from truck stops and rest areas at all hours. However, if you notice a passenger vehicle that pulls up and people get out of the vehicle and begin approaching trucks, you might be witnessing a trafficking situation. Similarly, the same can be said if a vehicle drops someone off at a truck and picks them up 15-20 minutes later.

- **Is the person showing any indication that they have a manager or pimp?**

Victims soliciting commercial sex might approach you and either reference that they have a manager or pimp or mention that they must make a quota. These are often significant signs of a trafficking situation.

- **Is the person exhibiting physical signs of distress, abuse, or branding tattoos?**

Some victims will exhibit physical signs of distress when in a trafficking situation. They might have bruises in various stages of healing or may seem fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, nervous, paranoid, timid, uncomfortable around another person, and even disoriented or confused. Victims may also exhibit deprivation of food, water, sleep, medical care, or other life necessities.

Be willing to take a second look, trust your instincts, and make a confidential call or text. Real-time reports help local authorities intervene quicker. Some people tend not to report because of the fear of being wrong. But it's better to be wrong than to let a trafficking situation continue.

If you see (or suspect) any indicators of human trafficking, assess the situation. Do not attempt to confront a suspected trafficker or engage with a victim. Instead, please contact local law enforcement directly. Report to:

- 9-1-1, if someone is in immediate danger.
- The National Human Trafficking Hotline: Call 888-373-7888 or text HELP or INFO to BeFree (233733). (*Texto 233733 o BEFREE*). This hotline is a national, toll-free hotline available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The hotline is operated by a non-governmental organization; it is not a law enforcement or immigration authority.

When describing the suspected human trafficking situation, describe specifically what you observed, including:

- Who or what you saw (physical identifiers, nicknames overheard).
- When you saw it (date and time).
- Where it occurred (where you noticed the suspicious activity and any movement, if applicable).
- Why it's suspicious.