

# Op-ed: The new abolitionist movement



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**By Sens. Stewart Greenleaf and Andy Dinniman**

As we continue to mark the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, a conflict that fundamentally shaped our nation, it is important that residents of our Commonwealth bear in mind our state's rich history as a center of the abolitionist movement – the movement to end slavery – in America.

How can we forget our Quaker heritage and the difficult and dangerous work of local abolitionists who not only spoke out against the evils of slavery, but also risked imprisonment to help slaves reach freedom?

Still, it is not enough to simply remember. To truly respect and honor our abolitionist heritage, we must commit ourselves to end slavery in all its forms today.

Human trafficking in Pennsylvania and the United States involves two groups – U.S. citizens and undocumented residents. In terms of U.S. citizens, according to the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape more than 100,000 individuals – mostly young girls – are trafficked for prostitution within the U.S. each year.

In terms of undocumented residents, thousands are brought to the United States by criminals who through violence and coercion force them into situations of sexual exploitation and forced labor. The number of victims of human trafficking worldwide is estimated at 12 million, according to the U.S. Department of State. Human trafficking today is the second largest form of global organized crime, just behind the illegal drug trade.

Due to the covert nature of human trafficking and a lack of reporting, accurate statistics are often difficult to obtain. However, there is no doubt that this modern day slavery is taking place in Pennsylvania and even right here in our own backyard. Human trafficking is real and widespread. Often victims are hiding in plain sight – forced into labor at a nail salon, a sweatshop, the agricultural industry, or a massage parlor or spa serving a front for a brothel. All too often, human trafficking is tragically mistaken for or prosecuted as another crime, with victims treated as criminals and sometimes even released into the custody of the very people who have victimized them.

That is why we have joined together and to call for new measures to put an end to human trafficking.

The key to effectively combating human trafficking is a combination of prosecution, protection and prevention. We must give law enforcement personnel the tools they need

to bring perpetrators to justice, while helping victims begin the path to recovery and preventing others from falling into the trap of human trafficking.

Last session, the Pennsylvania legislature unanimously passed Act 197 of 2012, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline Notification Act, which requires travel centers (airports, train and bus stations), as well as certain businesses, like adult clubs; personal service establishments where human contact takes place behind closed doors; and bars and hotels found to be drug-related nuisances by the Pennsylvania State Police, to post a human trafficking hotline poster in a clearly visible area. This was an important first step, but much more needs to be done.

Now, we are calling on our colleagues to pass Senate Bill 75, of which we are both sponsors and strong supporters. Senate Bill 75 would improve and better define Pennsylvania's human trafficking laws, so that they can be better utilized by law enforcement. The current legal definition of human trafficking is vague, making it difficult to effectively prosecute perpetrators, who are often charged with other crimes and allowed to plea to lesser charges. In addition, as we mentioned above, victims of human trafficking can face prostitution charges even though they have been forced into the sex trade.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 75 calls for the following:

- A new chapter in the Pennsylvania Crime Code focusing on human trafficking and strengthening the hands of prosecutors. It also stiffens the penalties and increases the fines for human trafficking.
- Establishing the Pennsylvania Council for the Prevention of Human Trafficking, which would be tasked with training law enforcement personnel, raising public awareness and enacting a state plan for the provision of services to human trafficking victims in Pennsylvania.
- Giving the victims of human trafficking express authority to bring civil suits against perpetrators for actual damages, compensatory damages, injunctive relief and any other appropriate relief.

Recently, Senate Bill 75 was unanimously approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee and sent to the Senate floor for the next vote. Together, we are calling on our constituents to encourage your state senators and representatives to approve this bill.

Finally, if you suspect that human trafficking may be occurring in your area, call the National Human Trafficking Resources Center at 1-888-373-788 to report tips, connect with anti-trafficking services or request training or technical assistance.

Who would have thought that more than 150 years after the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution we would be still talking about the scourge of slavery? It is a question that is both astounding and troubling, but one that presents a challenge that we are compelled to meet. Please join us in a new abolitionist movement to relegate slavery to the archives of history, once and for all.

**State Sen. Stewart Greenleaf, R-Montgomery, is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Sen. Andy Dinniman, D-Chester, is the ranking Democrat on the Senate Education Committee.**