

June 9th 2026 NAHT Board Meeting Minutes

Present: John Chesser, George Belitsos, Maggie Tinsman, Heather Glenn, Bernadette Rixner, Teresa Davidson, Stephanie Olson, Lyna Debner, Karl Schilling, Grace Lohse

Excused: Sara Kellums, Sarah Simon, Tom Barr, Linda Harrell, Kim Hilby, Tricia Thein, Shirley Fineran

Guests: Catherine Pollard, Threase Harms, Marielle Sweborg

1. Call to order and attendance

The meeting was called to order at 2:31 pm. Chesser called attendance and announced those who were present.

2. Legislative committee update. Discuss representation on the HF1036

coordinating committee, which includes, among a total of 13: NAHT rep; chief of police; HT survivor; direct service provider. Discuss other follow-up to this and other priority bills passed in 2026

Threase Harms provided an update on recent legislative activity, including the passage of House File 1036, which was intended to

establish a comprehensive approach to addressing human trafficking in Iowa. She explained that while the bill initially passed with the intended provisions, including the creation of a task force/annual review group, changes were later made through the legislative standings bill process.

Threase shared that an amendment was added in the Senate related to HHS child assessment language, which had been reviewed and agreed upon with HHS. However, additional language included in the standings bill removed Sections 1–4 of House File 1036, effectively eliminating the task force component. The change was not identified by Advocacy Strategies until after the standings bill had passed and was signed, leaving no opportunity for further action. Threase apologized for the oversight and clarified that the funding provisions remained intact, but the legislatively created task force was removed. Threase answered a question in response to Maggie Tinsman, stating that the nominations to the task force are no longer viable.

The Board discussed the impact of this change, noting that Iowa still lacks a statewide human trafficking plan or coordinated strategy among agencies. Threase emphasized that the purpose of the task force was to bring together state agencies, service providers, law enforcement, and other stakeholders to create a collaborative, comprehensive approach.

She noted that many entities currently operate independently, creating gaps in communication and coordination.

George Belitsos added that many other states have established human trafficking task forces or commissions and statewide plans and expressed concern that Iowa has lost progress due to the removal of the task force and reductions in prior human trafficking coordination state efforts. The Board discussed the importance of continuing advocacy efforts to establish a statewide strategy.

The Board also discussed an upcoming newly formed Secretary of State advisory committee meeting. Heather Glenn will attend the meeting under Secretary Paul Pate's office. Threase Harms encouraged Heather to bring forward concerns regarding the need for statewide coordination, communication between agencies, and the development of a comprehensive human trafficking plan. Heather agreed to report back to the Board following the meeting.

Threase also provided an update regarding the massage therapy licensing legislation, explaining that the new law will strengthen oversight by requiring licensing of establishments and practitioners, increasing enforcement authority, and creating a more centralized system for compliance.

Lastly, Threase reminded Board members that the NAHT legislative issues 2027 survey had been distributed and requested submissions by the deadline June 19th so the Legislative Committee can review priorities for the upcoming session. The Board also discussed potential future legislative priorities, including exploring funding opportunities for survivor services.

3. Letter to the Attorney General and Governor to ensure \$225,000 appropriation goes to the 6 human trafficking providers.

John Chesser provided an update regarding the letter sent to the Attorney General and Governor regarding the \$225,000 appropriation approved for Fiscal Year 2027 intended for long-term recovery services for human trafficking survivors.

John explained that after the letter was sent, he began communicating with John Gish regarding how the funds would be distributed. The Attorney General's office indicated that they were considering placing the \$225,000 into an existing victim services grant program rather than creating a separate funding opportunity specifically for the eight human trafficking survivor service providers. John expressed concern that this approach does not align with the intent of the legislative appropriation,

as organizations applying during the existing grant cycle were unaware that these additional funds would become available and many applications were not specifically focused on human trafficking services.

The Board discussed deep concerns that the funds will be distributed through a broader victim services grant process rather than being directed to the eight organizations providing dedicated human trafficking survivor services, including long-term recovery and housing support. John noted that the original intent was for the funding to support eight organizations providing comprehensive survivor services and that he would continue discussions with the Attorney General's office before determining next steps.

The Board clarified that two previously identified providers, Freedom House and Friends of the Family, were no longer included among the eligible human trafficking-specific service providers. Teresa Davidson explained that Freedom House closed and Friends of the Family no longer operates a dedicated human trafficking survivor program, though other organizations may be interested in developing survivor services.

Members expressed frustration that organizations working specifically with human trafficking survivors had advocated for this funding and that the current 2027 grant process does not provide a clear pathway for

those organizations to access the funds. Teresa noted that existing victim services grant criteria may not align with the needs of human trafficking-specific programs, particularly those providing long-term recovery services.

The Board discussed possible next steps, including sending an additional letter expressing disappointment if the Attorney General's office does not adjust the funding approach. Members also discussed engaging legislators who supported the original appropriation to reinforce the intent behind the funding. George Belitsos suggested that future appropriations may need to be directed through a separate funding structure or potentially another state agency if the Attorney General's office is unable to administer the funds as intended.

The Board agreed to continue advocacy efforts to ensure the appropriation supports human trafficking survivor services as originally intended. John will continue communication with the Attorney General's office and provide updates.

4. Approval of NAHT Treasurer's Report

George Belitsos presented the Treasurer's Report. NAHT received approximately \$402 in income from T-shirt sales, including a \$40 check

from Lynette Debner and a \$362 check from Tom Barr from T-shirt sales at the Rotary State Convention.

George also reported that additional PayPal contributions totaling approximately \$400–\$500 were received but will be reflected in the following month's report due to timing of the PayPal statement.

Additionally, NAHT received notification of a bequest from Shirley Redding as part of a larger \$10,000 bequest distributed among several organizations. The estimated amount to NAHT is expected to be a few thousand dollars, though payment has not yet been received.

The Treasurer's Report was approved.

5. Shirlee Reding's memorial service and gift to the NAHT:

Plymouth Church, Des

Moines, IA on June 16th with the memorial at 12:30pm and service at 1:00pm

George Belitsos discussed the upcoming memorial service for **Shirlee Redding**, a longtime NAHT board member and dedicated advocate against human trafficking. He shared that Shirlee was highly active with NAHT, contributed significant volunteer work, and remained engaged after retiring from the board as an emeritus member.

George noted Shirlee's commitment to the mission, including her work as a nurse and her continued involvement in outreach efforts. John Chesser shared that he will represent NAHT at Shirlee's memorial service, which will be held on **June 16 at Plymouth Congregational Church in Des Moines.**

John also reflected on Shirlee's continued advocacy, including her participation in NAHT events and her favorite outreach event, the annual nurses convention, where she educated healthcare professionals about human trafficking.

6. Approval of May Board Meeting Minutes & Maddie Judas to take board minutes

John Chesser presented the May Board Meeting minutes for review and noted that corrections had been made to the AI-generated draft. He also announced that Maddie Judas, NAHT Tech Consultant has agreed to resume taking NAHT meeting minutes, as she had previously done while she was an Iowa State student. Maddie will prepare minutes using meeting recordings and transcripts rather than attending live.

The board reviewed the minutes. Maggie Tinsman made a motion to approve the May Board Meeting minutes, and Bernadette seconded the motion. The motion passed.

7. World Day Against Trafficking projects to take place on July 30th

John Chesser shared that Tom Barr was seeking updates on any planned activities, projects, or events for July 30th, World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Board members discussed several awareness initiatives:

- **Red Sand Project:** Maggie Tinsman shared that a Red Sand Project event is planned in Davenport, noting that it typically receives good media coverage. Bernadette also mentioned their group is considering doing a Red Sand Project event.
- **Community 5K Event:** Heather Van Hemert Glenn shared details about a July 30th 5K event in Pella, including a 5:45 PM walk/run start, community activities, food, and partnership with the local farmers market. She also announced a balloon release recognizing awareness of human trafficking and domestic survivors after reaching 1,000 Facebook followers. Remedy Drive will play music at the event.
- **Fundraising Efforts:** George Belitsos reported on behalf of Tom Barr and the fundraising committee that July 30th will be used as a fundraising opportunity due to the NAHT being behind on

fundraising goals. A July 30th fundraising flyer created by Sarah Simon will be shared through social media and included in the July newsletter, encouraging donations from board members and supporters.

- **Statewide Awareness Campaign:** Teresa Davidson shared that Chains Interrupted is conducting Red Sand Project activities throughout the month leading up to July 30th, including church partnerships and social media awareness efforts. She also announced Chains Interrupted's 10-year anniversary celebration on August 6th.
- Belitsos asked Board members to share photos and flyers from events for inclusion in NAHT's July newsletter and social media outreach.

8. Review of the draft 2027 Day on the Hill flyer

John Chesser shared that the Executive Committee reviewed the draft 2027 Day on the Hill Save the Date flyer and sent it out for board review. Board members were invited to provide any comments, corrections, or suggestions to George Belitsos. George noted that the event date is set for Thursday, January 21, 2027, and encouraged everyone to mark their calendars. John mentioned the date is later than usual due to the timing of the new governor transition.

9. Startup of Service Provider Collaboration meetings by Melody Stone

John Chesser shared that Melody Stone is working to establish an in-person meeting for the monthly provider collaborative to serve as a clearinghouse and networking opportunity for human trafficking service providers across the state. The group will help reconnect providers and revive the previous statewide provider meetings that had transitioned from in-person gatherings to Zoom and later became periodic updates, provided by Belitsos.

Belitsos noted that NAHT maintains a list of more than 60 providers and shared the contact list with Melody to support restarting these meetings. The collaboration may include in-person or virtual meetings and will focus on frontline service providers, complementing existing leadership-level collaborations. George also offered to add new providers to the communication list.

10. Discussion Regarding Pieper Lewis Conviction and Advocacy Letter

George Belitsos requested an update from Teresa Davidson regarding the recent 20-year conviction of **Pieper Lewis**, a case that has been a major concern within the human trafficking advocacy community.

George noted that the Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking and

other organizations have previously advocated on Pieper's behalf and expressed disappointment regarding the severe 20-year sentence.

Teresa provided an update, explaining the history of Pieper's case, including her experiences as a trafficking survivor, the challenges surrounding her restoration placement, and concerns that the media has not fully represented the circumstances surrounding Pieper's time in treatment. Teresa shared that Pieper had previously made progress in a restoration program, obtained employment, and was doing well before voluntarily returning to Iowa and receiving the 20-year sentence.

Teresa explained that she is working with national organizations, including Shared Hope International and Rights4Girls, to pursue advocacy efforts and is preparing a letter to the Governor requesting a pardon or other form of relief. She stated that Chains Interrupted plans to lead the effort and will seek support from organizations across Iowa and nationally.

Board members expressed support for advocating on Pieper's behalf.

George made a motion for the Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking to have John Chesser sign onto the advocacy letter, pending his review. Heather seconded the motion. After discussion regarding the wording of the letter and possible options such as commutation, the motion was amended to state that John would sign the letter on behalf of

the board subject to the review of the entire board. The motion passed unanimously with one abstention.

11. Motion to skip the NAHT's Board Meeting in July

John Chessser noted that the board traditionally skips one meeting during the summer, either in July or August, and opened discussion on which month to take off.

Maggie Tinsman made a motion to not hold the July board meeting, and Karl Schilling seconded the motion. After discussion, the board reached consensus to skip the July meeting rather than August.

The board also discussed the previously mentioned advocacy letter regarding Pieper Lewis. George Belitsos requested that the letter be sent to the full board and asked to be informed whether John Chessser signs it. John agreed to share the letter and keep the board updated.

The next full board meeting will be held in August. The legislative committee will continue meeting in July as scheduled.