

## Meeting Minutes

### Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking Board of Directors

May 17, 2022

**Present:** Dr. George Belitsos, John Chesser, Maggie Tinsman, Linda Harrel, Lara Marsh, Thomas Barr, Chelsea Hoye, Jessica Hagin, Alyse Hardin, Lyna Debner, MacKenzie Bills, Bernadette Rixner

**Excused Absence:** Sister Shirley Fineran, Jessica Rohrs

**Guests:** Jessica Hagin, YSS Human Trafficking Transitional Living Coordinator, Isabelle Elwood, Technology Consultant, and Threase Harms, Legislative Consultant

#### **I. Call to order. Introduction to guests. (Belitsos)**

Belitsos declared a quorum at 2:30 pm. Belitsos welcomed Jessica Hagin, a direct service provider and prospective board member. Hagin reported that YSS based in Ames has a federal grant to provide two years of transitional living services plus counseling to eight young survivors of human trafficking. Belitsos introduced Isabelle Elwood as a new technology consultant. Elwood is a current junior at Iowa State University who studies Psychology and Sociology. Elwood's interest in those subjects piqued her interest in human trafficking and attended the Human Trafficking Summit.

#### **II. Annual report and 2021 human trafficking statistics from the Victim Service Call Center. (Jessica Rohrs)**

Rohrs was unable to report on her agenda item due to an emergency. Since this was the second month that Rohrs was unable to attend, board members suggested that Rohrs simply submit a written report to the board.

#### **III. Progress report on HF2464 from the Legislative Advocacy Committee. (Tinsman)**

Tinsman began her report by saying that she has been working hard on the passage of House File 2464 this year with legislative associates Harms and Hoye. The Safe Harbor law will protect minors against prosecution from any crime committed while they were trafficked and enacts expungement of crimes committed by adult survivors. The bill passed the House 95 to one. It then passed out of a Senate Committee but has been held up because the Department of Public Safety believes that arresting and detaining those under 18 will prevent them from returning back to their traffickers. However, arresting them makes them a young criminals too. They do not seem to trust the Department of Human Services. It appears they do not know what all human services does, and Human Services does not know what law enforcement does either.

An amendment has been offered to create an interim workgroup, which will provide the 2023 legislature with recommendations on how to move HF2464 forward. It directs the Department of Public Safety, Department of Human Services, and Victim Services in the Attorney General's Office all to work together to return with recommendations for legislative consideration. The

workgroup will consider root causes of trafficking victimization in Iowa, and the need to build partnerships between DHS, Public Safety, and Victim Services in the Attorney General's Office. Tinsman stressed the importance of forming a team from these groups, so they can respond to trafficking survivors, identify the needs of victims, and better understand civil and criminal legal options available to assist survivors.

Tinsman asked Harms to explain what is currently happening with this piece of legislature and where it is going moving forward. Harms clarified that the amendment would first have to be approved by the Senate and next go over to the House, so they can approve it. Harms explains how the Legislature has not worked for the past 3 weeks as they have been in legislative overtime. The Senate Appropriations Committee will be coming in and meeting tomorrow. They will be coming in and passing the Senate versions of budget bills tomorrow and are going to amend them to what the Senate numbers want. They are going to make progress from that perspective to tee the budget bills up to pass as early as Monday or Tuesday on the Senate floor. The biggest issues are that the House and the Senate have come to a crossroads on the budget and the governor's education voucher program has become one of the final issues that has created this hold-up.

Harms said she, unfortunately, thinks in today's world where they are trying to get out before next Friday that the amendment will not be taken up by the Senate. She explained their goal is to adjourn before Memorial Day, so if they make a run for that, there is a limited amount of time to push bills, such as ours to the finish line. Harms believes that our bill at this point in time has fallen victim to the bouncing bills battle because it will require to go back to the other chamber to be amended meaning and if you have to bounce, you probably are not going anywhere.

Harms explained that the Department of Public Safety commissioner understands what we are trying to accomplish but "philosophically" does not agree. She thinks that the commissioner spoke with friends or law enforcement champions in the Senate, and they have essentially killed the bill. Harms has continued to reach out to the decision-makers and ask for this bill to move forward. Harms reported that there has been no success in getting it to move in the last 3 weeks, and she highly doubts it will move any further than where it is today.

Harms reassured the board that her team has already started putting together a plan on what we can and need to do during the interim, particularly with the Governor's office, Public Safety Office, and Department of Human Services (DHS) to get everybody on the same page. This way we can get some legislation that everybody could agree to in the next session. Harms explained that we are a victim of how this session has gone and the "philosophical difference" of the public safety commissioner's personal opinion, which has created a hurdle that we are not able to overcome at this point.

Barr heard that Commissioner Barnes is interested in arresting and confining minors who are victims to get them away from traffickers. Second, he heard that they need to arrest the minor victim and detain them, so they do not return to the trafficker. Barr believes if the Commissioner had heard the survivor speak at the Summit, about a trafficker feeling like family, Barnes would understand that there is no way to get the survivor to turn on their trafficker all by himself. Barr also suggested that we look into Minnesota's Safe Harbor law and see how a Safe Harbor law works. Barr wondered if Minnesota would help without incurring costs or if they would be any help to get through this next hurdle. Harms responded by saying we have already been working very closely with Minnesota. They have been our closest ally outside of Iowa. Harms says we

have been engaging with them and they have offered help, so we will continue to engage with them.

Chesser mentioned how many states have a state-funded human trafficking task force made up of state agencies, but Iowa does not have one. Barr said just trying to get to the trafficker has nothing to do with expunging the record of a minor under the age of 18. Belitsos asked if it would have been better for us to keep those two items separate and should we consider having an expungement piece of legislation and then the Safe Harbor. Harms responded that Belitsos's statement was certainly something to consider. She believes that if they had that exponent separately, the bill would have gone and not been an issue because we got caught on the Safe Harbor piece.

Tinsman agreed working with Minnesota as a team would be a good step in progress. Tinsman mentioned a bill passed and signed by the governor that allows criminal and juvenile justice officers to disseminate the personal information and photos of a person who is missing or is involved in the disappearance of a minor. Another bill strikes the requirement that finding domestic or sexual abuse must occur before the court approves the consent agreement. One bill regarding bailable offense added three offenses to the code, sexual abuse in the first degree, second degree, and third degree. Tinsman explained it requires individuals accused of one of these three new offenses to appear before a magistrate prior to their release on bail, and this bill passed unanimously and is waiting for the governor's signature. Tinsman mentioned the last bill waiting for a signature regarding that the rule of evidence for sexual abuse cases applies to discovery proceedings and post-conviction proceedings. The Senate amended that bill, adding hearsay exceptions for children and physical sexual abuse cases and per persons with developmental disabilities, and that passed the House 92 to 3 and the Senate as amended 47 to 0.

Belitsos said that none of those were our priorities, but it is good to show that there are some things that did pass that are going to help the fight against human trafficking. He explained this was a disappointing year, and it is no one's fault. Belitsos thanks Harms and their advocacy group for doing a wonderful job representing the interests of survivors and the Network. Belitsos said it was so exciting that we got almost a unanimous vote for something have been working on for years, and then it all fell apart. Tinsman stated how social services, law enforcement, and public safety must become a team. Belitsos is hopeful for next year.

Tinsman responded that we have found now is that public safety does not know what social services does and social services does not know what law enforcement does, which is why they must become a team. Belitsos agreed that they must work together. After the legislature is adjourned, Harms will have a final written wrap-up for the board along with a list of other bills that they were engaged in.

Rixner commented it is not only Commissioner Barnes, but he reflects the attitude of a lot of police. Harms counters this argument as prosecutors and county attorneys seem to be more against the bill. Harms said police chiefs came out in support of the legislation. She explained there is a lot of work that needs to be done over the interim and how frustrating it is to have a bill stop in its tracks. There is also a lot of work to be done with the prosecutor side, Victim Services, Department of Human Services (DHS). If the legislature does not pass the interim work group, Harms said we might set up meetings with the directors of all those departments to share how they work together. Rixner said we need to bring legislators up to speed on the status of human trafficking and human trafficking legislation in Iowa.

#### **IV. Annual report by NAHT Consulting Webmaster. (Lara Marsh)**

Belitsos introduced Marsh and asked her to give an annual report and explain the fluctuation in her billing. She has been the NAHT webmaster for eight years, and one month her bill was over \$600 and then last month it was \$250. Marsh runs a small business in Iowa City called Rather Than Running that does web hosting, design, and maintenance for a variety of clients, mainly nonprofits and small businesses. For the Network, she does website maintenance, blog post, social media, and email marketing.

For example, Belitsos or his intern will send Marsh the monthly blog post, so she can format it for the website to post or for an email marketing message. Several posts were created to get people to talk to legislators about passing House File 2464. Marsh also adds new resources to the resource list, post new sticker images, and whatever technology or maintenance that needs to be done.

Marsh said that she has a discounted rate for non-profit organizations and typically bills the Network around \$300 a month. One reason for the higher monthly billing was that she worked on posting the IBAT information for about 10 hours and had to take it back down due to objections from the Iowa Secretary of State. The second reason was she built a new method of creating the online resource directory to make links easier to maintain. Marsh asked if this explained why her hourly bill went up some months compared to her standard rate and Tinsman agreed that it did.

Belitsos recognized Marsh's good work and assistance and thanked her for doing an excellent job for the NAHT.

#### **V. Outcome of May 10th and 11th Human Trafficking Summit: What did you learn? (All who attended)**

Belitsos and several board members attended the Human Trafficking Summit in Des Moines. He asked if attendees would share how it felt being back together and what they gained from attending.

Chesser began by saying how he gained a lot of information from a presentation by Jennifer Dooley and by a survivor from AEquitas. There was also an excellent presentation that helped Chesser better understand the work that Harms is doing. The NAHT update session presenters did quite well and there was real spontaneous conversation between people in the room.

Barr picked up a helpful tip of using open-ended questions instead of assuming and offering suggestions not solutions. Overall, of all the examples discussed, the phraseology was appropriate and a good reminder. He also enjoyed the opportunity to meet the CEO of the Set Me Free program and is going to do a follow-up with her.

Harrell said this was her first time attending, and she gained a lot of knowledge in reference to sex trafficking, how to pose questions to survivors, and when it is best to listen. She gained a lot of knowledge and is looking forward to additional conferences.

Rixner was not sure how she felt about the Summit. She thought it would be better as a one-day Summit since traveling can take up a great deal of time or as a webinar. With a webinar, you can attend multiple breakout sessions without missing anything. Rixner also asked when there was going to be concrete material sent out, so she could share the information with her local law enforcement.

Belitsos noted his high point was the NAHT breakout session because it was a review of progress and some great collaborative accomplishments in Iowa. We are ahead of many other States even though it sounded like we were behind in the legislative report, but we are only behind this year, we have done a lot in previous years, and we will get there.

Tinsman liked how the Summit referenced survivors as persons with strength and uniqueness rather than as victims. The Iowa State University presenter said that she has been teaching human trafficking for over 10 years. They also mentioned that most of the buyers are not only white men and many have female daughters and a level of income of at least \$50,000. The reason behind survivors not wanting help was also explained. Tinsman said she had not understood how big the threat of violence is to a survivor and that there is remorse, guilt, love, trauma, fear, shame, and distrust of law enforcement. She learned a lot and was happy that she went.

Belitsos recognized that Rixner had some good points reporting the time and expenses required for a two-day event. He believes the seminar was put off during the pandemic because the Attorney General's office wanted to make it interpersonal. He felt it was more valuable to make it an in-person event

## **VI. Review and approval of Consent Agenda. Reminder:**

**If you wish to remove any motion from the consent agenda for additional information or debate you may do so. No second is required. (Belitsos)**

- a. Motion to approve April 19th meeting minutes of the NAHT Board of Directors.
- b. Motion to approve the April Acting Treasurer Report.
- c. Motion to approve the contract for consulting services by ISU student Madeline Judas beginning May 20th, 2022. Madeline will be taking the place of Savannah who graduates with her master's degree from ISU. Madeline will be paid \$12/hour.
- d. Motion to suspend the rules and to approve a consulting contract with a board member, MacKenzie Bills to provide facilitator services at a rate of \$50/hour.
- e. Motion to elect Tom Barr to the NAHT Board of Directors.

Belitsos listed the corrections made on contracts, specifically date errors and noted how the contract can be broken at any time by either party. He then asked if anyone wanted to take anything off the consent agenda that you want for more information or discussion.

Rixner responded saying she would like to pull motion (e) and further discuss how someone becomes a board member. Belitsos agreed to pull the motion and vote on the balance of the consent agenda. **The consent agenda passed unanimously.**

Motion (e) is to be voted on separately. Belitsos shares how Barr has contributed as a proxy to board meetings, attended the Human Trafficking Summit, has community leadership experience, and is a Rotary Club leader in the fight against human trafficking.

Rixner said she does not have a doubt about Barr and assumes they are going to pass it. She asked how one becomes elected or if the NAHT has a process for nominating people for membership. It always seems like they show up on the agenda without much of a background story other than their resume. She wonders if when she has a fantastic candidate, should she contact Belitsos for consideration. Belitsos explained that the procedure is in the NAHT bylaws.

Belitsos explained the Executive Committee also serves as the nominating committee. Any Board member could submit a suggestion at any time the NAHT has an opening. Rixner asked how many openings we have and Belitsos confirmed we have seven vacancies. Rixner suggested that the Board should fill vacancies by looking at geographical areas that are not covered and agencies that are currently not represented. Those on the call agreed. **Motion (e) passed unanimously.**

Tinsman would like to nominate Amy Ratekin whose resume was in the Board packet. SHE wants to put it on the agenda for a vote at the next meeting.

**VII. Executive session for board members only. Continuation of three special board planning meetings were previously held on April 5th, 12th, and 19th. (Facilitator MacKenzie Bills)**

**The meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.**

**Next Board Meeting: Tuesday June 14th, 2:30 - 4:00 pm**