

May 2026 NAHT Board Meeting Minutes

Present: John Chesser, George Belitsos, Heather Van Hemert-Glenn, Teresa Davidson, Grace Lohse, Shirley Fineran, Maggie Tinsman, Tom Barr, Bernadette, Karl Schilling

Excused: Sara Kellums, Sarah Simon, Linda Harrell, Kim Hilby, Tricia Thein, Stephanie Olson, Lyna Debner

Guests: Marrielle Sweborg (Maggie's Secretary), Catherine Pollard and Threase Harms (Advocacy Strategies)

1. Call to order and attendance

John Chesser called the meeting to order at 2:30 pm.

2. New board member introductions: Grace Lohse, Heather Van Hemert-Glenn.

John Chesser welcomed new board members Grace Lohse and Heather Van Hemert-Glenn. The introduction of the new members was briefly delayed while the board waited for Heather to join the meeting.

The board also discussed the possibility of adding Emily to the board in light of Sister Shirley Fineran's upcoming move to Dubuque. Sister Shirley noted that having someone more consistently connected to Lila May's House could be beneficial. George Belitsos and John Chesser expressed support for the idea.

The board discussed the process for adding new members. George explained that prospective board members go through the Executive Committee and that there is no set cycle for accepting new board members.

3. Legislative session update: passage of HF 1036 and HF 2602 and follow up to these bills; appropriation of \$225,000 to the AG's fund for HT survivor services; priorities for interim and 2027 session (Threase Harms, Catherine Pollard).

Threase Harms and Catherine Pollard provided an update on the 2026 Iowa legislative session.

Threase thanked the board for its engagement and assistance throughout the legislative session, particularly members who provided information, responded to questions, contacted legislators, and helped advocate for NAHT's priorities.

Legislative Session Overview

The legislative session included approximately 1,800 bills introduced in both chambers, with 146 bills ultimately sent to the Governor. Threase noted that NAHT had significant success in advancing its priorities despite the challenging end to the session. Several major issues dominated the legislative session, including property tax reform, eminent domain, water quality, immigration, and crime-related legislation.

Human Trafficking Funding

The board discussed the state budget and funding for human trafficking-related programs. The Justice Systems budget received approximately \$938 million. Funding for the Office to Combat Human Trafficking and the Department of Public Safety was level-funded. Victim assistance grants received a \$25,000 increase. NAHT also secured an additional \$75,000 in funding to support its work. Threase emphasized that securing an increase was a significant accomplishment given the state's budget challenges and projected revenue shortfall.

The additional funding was attributed in part to information NAHT provided to legislators regarding the costs of operating human trafficking survivor services and other sources of revenue available to service providers.

The budget also included language requiring the Department of Justice to continue funding human trafficking training through court fees and other sources. The board discussed the long-term goal of obtaining \$1 million in annual funding for human trafficking survivor services. Threase suggested that NAHT consider advocating for a dedicated funding source connected to a future nicotine/tobacco tax rather than relying solely on the state's General Fund. Maggie

Tinsman expressed interest in discussing this strategy in greater detail with Threase. Threase and Maggie agreed to connect regarding the issue.

House File 1036 – Comprehensive Human Trafficking Bill

Threase reported that House File 1036, the Comprehensive Human Trafficking Bill, successfully passed during the final days of the legislative session.

The bill had passed through the House Judiciary Committee earlier in the session but remained pending in the Senate for much of the session. NAHT advocates continued working with legislators to move the bill forward.

The final legislation included updated dates and revised Department of Health and Human Services screening language. The bill also retained the provision requiring an annual statewide stakeholder meeting, which George Belitsos had strongly advocated for.

Threase credited Representative Grace Lohse, Representative Cheryl Lynn Westrich, Senate Majority Leader Mike Clemish, Brian, and others for helping ensure the bill remained a priority and ultimately passed.

John Chesser noted that HF 1036 contains many of NAHT's desired provisions, including five years of meetings and reports and required use of screening tools, but emphasized that passage of legislation must be followed by implementation and oversight.

The board discussed the importance of monitoring state agencies to ensure the requirements of HF 1036 are actually implemented. Threase agreed that implementation and follow-through should be a priority for NAHT's Legislative Committee.

Because the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services was in the process of transitioning leadership, Threase noted that NAHT may need to provide additional outreach and support to ensure the new leadership understands and implements the requirements of the legislation.

Massage Establishment Licensure

Threase reported that legislation requiring massage establishments, in addition to individual massage therapists, to be licensed also passed. The legislation was viewed as an important tool for law enforcement and the Board of Massage Licensure in addressing repeat offenders and human trafficking concerns associated with certain establishments.

Human Trafficking Training for Truck Drivers

Legislation supported by the Motor Truck Association requiring human trafficking training for truck drivers also passed. Bernadette raised questions about how the training would be implemented and whether existing training programs are sufficiently current and effective. She specifically expressed concern that some existing training relies on outdated material.

Threase agreed to follow up with the Motor Truck Association and other appropriate contacts to determine how the training requirement will be implemented and what training resources will be accepted.

Additional legislation discussed included:

- Legislation prohibiting deferred sentences for sexual exploitation of a minor.
- Legislation addressing grooming behaviors by school employees.
- The Attorney General's bill, which included Katie's Law as well as provisions addressing victim services confidentiality and liability, protection orders, sex offender registration, and crime victim compensation.
- Expungement legislation for trafficking survivors, which passed through a Senate committee but did not receive a floor vote. Threase reported that discussions with legislators provided useful guidance for potentially revisiting the issue in a future session.

Threase also noted that the 2026 elections will result in a number of new legislators due to retirements and candidates seeking higher office. She emphasized the importance of educating new legislators about NAHT and its priorities.

The board discussed the need to continue working toward the organization's long-term goal of securing \$1 million in dedicated funding for human trafficking survivor services.

4. March minutes; treasurer's report (George)

The board reviewed and approved the previous meeting's minutes with amendments. Shirley Fineran noted that her name was missing from the attendance list, and George Belitsos corrected the minutes to reflect that Tom Barr, rather than George, had sent the 2025 statistical chart request to the Southern U.S. Attorney's Office. The amended minutes were approved. George then presented the April 2026 Treasurer's Report, noting \$585 in income, including a \$300 donation from United Ames United Church of Christ, a \$35 Thrivent grant/donation, and a \$250 personal gift from George (in recognition of World Day Against Trafficking). The largest expense was a \$5,158.61 payment to Advocacy Strategies for legislative services, which included \$158.61 in additional printing expenses. The board unanimously approved the Treasurer's Report.

5. Acceptance of resignation of Austin Stubbs; Sr. Shirley nomination of her ED.

John Chesser reported that Austin Stubbs had submitted his resignation from the NAHT Board following a change in employment circumstances. Chesser stated that Stubbs had expressed appreciation for his time serving on the board and for the support he had received.

Sr. Shirley Fineran moved to accept Austin Stubbs' resignation from the board. George Belitsos seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously with no opposition.

6. Update on Fundraising Committee.

Tom Barr provided an update on fundraising efforts and asked board members to help identify someone who could assist the organization with grant writing. He also asked board members to share their plans for July 30, World Day Against Trafficking, including ways to promote

awareness, educate their communities, support events, and raise funds for NAHT. Tom encouraged members to consider fundraising activities such as walks or 5Ks, Red Sand Project events, community fundraisers, and auctions of the organization's "End Human Trafficking" T-shirts. Heather Van Hemert-Glenn suggested a "Change to Make Change" campaign through local churches, where congregations collect loose change throughout a designated month for a selected organization. Tom expressed support for the idea and encouraged other board members to share fundraising suggestions. John Chessier noted that the fundraising committee would likely meet soon and encouraged board members to participate or send their ideas directly to Tom.