

NAHT Board Meeting February 10, 2026

Present: Tom Barr, John Chesser, Maggie Tinsman, George Belitsos, Sarah Simon, Lyna Debner, Austin Stubbs, Sr. Shirley Fineran, Teresa Davidson, Heather Brown, Bernadette Rixner, Karl Schilling, Sara Kellums, Stephanie Olson.

Excused Absence: Kim Hilby, Linda Harrell, Chief Tricia Thein

Key takeaways

- Ray Fiedler from the Office to Combat Human Trafficking provided updates on hotel recertification, tip line effectiveness, and task force development.
- The merger between DOT and DPS has created gaps in human trafficking awareness programs previously managed by DOT.
- The Iowa tip line received 44 tips in the last year, while the national hotline provided only one tip in the past 6 months.
- The Network's fundraising exceeded its \$20,000 goal last year, with significant contributions including a \$10,000 gift.
- Several human trafficking-related bills are progressing through the Iowa legislature, including HF1036 which addresses trafficking enforcement teams.
- Pieper Lewis has a hearing scheduled for February 20th, with Teresa Davidson assisting her new attorneys.

Office to Combat Human Trafficking Update

Ray Fiedler provided an overview of current efforts and challenges. He reported that DPS is processing hotel recertifications, with hotels submitting applications every couple weeks. He noted increased calls and information from both law enforcement and the public and mentioned they've had to train additional staff to handle the increased workload. Maggie asked why prostitution isn't considered human trafficking under Iowa code. Ray replied that trafficking requires proof of force, fraud, or coercion for adults, while minors involved in commercial sex are automatically considered trafficking victims. George raised concerns about the Iowa code still allowing minors to be arrested for prostitution. Teresa Davidson clarified that DHHS categorized 16 children under "prostitution of a child" category, though they weren't arrested. Ray agreed to look into the code language regarding minors and prostitution.

Tip Line Effectiveness

Ray expressed disappointment with the national hotline, noting they received only one tip from them in about 6 months whereas the state tip line received 44 tips in the last year and 114 tips through their phone and website combined. George proposed including the national hotline number on stickers, especially with the new provider. Heather said that the National Survivor Network generally supports local tip lines over the national line. Teresa noted the national hotline receives about 900 calls per week but has limited budget.

Ray agreed to reconsider including the national hotline number on stickers.

DOT HT duties reassigned to DPS

NAHT board member noted that the reassignment of HT duties from DOT to DPS has created gaps in previously successful anti-trafficking initiatives. Bernadette inquired about training for truckers and bus drivers that was previously conducted by DOT. George noted that Iowa was the first state to require school bus drivers to be trained in recognizing human trafficking, but this ended after the merger. George mentioned that DOT's website with service provider information has disappeared. George requested restoration of stickers in rest stops that were previously maintained by DOT. Ray agreed to speak with DPS leadership about continuing DOT's human trafficking awareness programs. The merger has created gaps in previously successful anti-trafficking initiatives.

Human Trafficking Task Force

Ray discussed the development of a statewide task force and explained they started a task force about 2 years ago to address gaps in agency training and coordination. He reported approximately 30 agencies with about 40 detectives are now participating and mentioned quarterly meetings and training opportunities for task force members. Karl asked about legislation (HF1036 and HF1011) that would create trafficking enforcement teams. Ray noted that the legislation came from legislators, not his office, but aligns with their efforts. Ray added that the task force has been more successful than anticipated in recruiting participating agencies and that DPS is working to secure MOUs with additional agencies.

Treasurer's Report and Minutes

George presented the financial status of the organization. He reported \$1,343.50 in deposits for January, including an unexpected \$856 gift from Blackbaud Network/Your Cause. He noted two \$100 checks, including one from the Sisters of St. Francis in Dubuque and mentioned the largest expense was for the webmaster (Code and Content). John highlighted that they received free printing of 300 brochures, saving approximately \$500. The Treasurer's Report was unanimously approved, moved by Maggie and seconded by Stephanie. The January minutes were approved unanimously, moved by Maggie and seconded by Sr. Shirley, subject to correction of a typo ("uniformed" not "uninformed").

Fundraising Update

Tom provided an update on fundraising efforts. He thanked everyone for helping exceed the \$20,000 fundraising goal for 2025. Tom described the proposed February "Month of Love" campaign, stating "every victim was a sweetheart in someone's family before they were trafficked." Stephanie cautioned about the language, noting that victims of familial trafficking may never have been considered "sweethearts." Sr. Shirley agreed with Stephanie's concerns about the language. Tom welcomed suggestions for alternative phraseology.

Legislative Update

John reported that House File 1036 (Representative Lohse's bill) passed the subcommittee and could be taken up by the full committee soon. Teresa Davidson mentioned she sent an email to all senators on the Judiciary Committee with information about service gaps and noted that Freedom House (restoration center for minors) recently closed and Friends of the Family in Waterloo had a fire affecting their shelter. Karl reported that massage parlor licensing legislation is progressing well, and bills on sex abuse education in schools, expungement of criminal records for trafficking victims, and penalties for sexual exploitation of children under 12 are advancing. Maggie urged board members to contact their state senators to support increasing funding for trafficking survivor services from \$150,000 to \$1 million.

Pieper Lewis Case Update

Teresa provided an update on Pieper Lewis's case. George asked about Pieper's upcoming trial on February 20th. She explained she's been helping Pieper's new attorneys gather information from past hearings and noted Pieper has new attorneys because she's now over 18 and no longer eligible for juvenile public defenders. Teresa mentioned Pieper wants to share her story at the Chains Interrupted gala on March 28th, but is having difficulty arranging to record her statement from jail.

Day on the Hill Recap

Brief discussion about the January 22nd event at the Capitol. Teresa Davidson and John reported a positive meeting with Senator Schultz, who was supportive of anti-trafficking legislation. Sr. Shirley mentioned meetings with Representative J.D. Scholten and Senator Caitlin Drew, who were both supportive. Maggie noted a good meeting with Representative Gary Mohr, who chairs appropriations for the Iowa House. George was impressed with the turnout and diversity of attendees, including many legislators.

IBAT Program Recognition

George proposed congratulating the Secretary of State for establishing the IBAT program, which has nearly reached 1,000 participating businesses. He added that the Secretary of State's office has done more than any other state agency to raise awareness about human trafficking. John mentioned that with DOT no longer active in this area, the Secretary of State's office stands out even more. The board unanimously approved a motion to commend the Secretary of State's office for the IBAT program; George moved and Lyna seconded. George will write up the commendation.

Brittany Sowder resignation

Due to a job change and other commitments, board member Brittany Sowder submitted her resignation. The resignation was accepted unanimously, moved by George and seconded by Maggie.

City and County Proclamations

George provided an update on proclamations recognizing Human Trafficking Awareness Month and thanked board members who sent photos of proclamation signings for the February blog. George gave special recognition to Lyna Debner for obtaining proclamations from cities and counties that had never made them before. He added that they have exceeded 60 proclamations, many obtained by board members and noted that Rotary Clubs have made significant contributions to this effort.