

NAHT Board Meeting October 14, 2025: Minutes

- **Present.** Tom Barr, Karl Schilling, Sr. Shirley Fineran, Threase Harms, Maggie Tinsman, John Chesser, Lyna Debner, Stephanie Olson, Linda Harrell, Chief Patricia Thein, George Belitsos, Bernadette Rixner, Sara Kellums. **Excused absences:** Teresa Davidson, Sarah Simon, Kim Hilby, Austin Stubbs, Brittany Sowder.

Key takeaways

- The Iowa legislature has experienced significant changes with three sitting legislators passing away and three resignations, creating a domino effect in committee leadership positions.
- The Network Against Human Trafficking (NAHT) is advocating for \$1 million in funding for human trafficking survivor services, up from the current \$150,000.
- Board members are encouraged to contact their state senators before January to advocate for the increased funding.
- George is offering a \$500 matching challenge grant for Giving Tuesday donations to help reach the \$7,500 fundraising goal.
- The organization is collecting trafficking statistics from various agencies to create a comprehensive report for 2024.
- The National Human Trafficking Hotline contract has been transferred from Polaris to Compass Connections, raising concerns about survivor confidentiality being lost to law enforcement

Legislative update

Threase Harms provided an update on changes in the Iowa legislature. Threase reported that since January, three sitting legislators have passed away and three have resigned, creating a domino effect in committee leadership. The House has a new Health and Human Services chair, which impacts their work with HHS on reaching children. The Senate also has a new Health and Human Services chair, Senator Kara Warne from Ames. Two new leaders are House Majority Leader Bobby Kaufman and Senate Majority Leader Mike Klimesh. **Sr. Shirley** added that Caitlin Drew replaced Rocky DeWitt in Sioux City, replacing a Republican with a Democrat, which broke the Republican supermajority in the Senate.

• Conclusion

- Two pending special elections will take place on December 9th and December 30th.
- NAHT will ask for House File 1036 to be reassigned to the Health and Human Services Committee.

Human trafficking funding advocacy

Maggie Tinsman discussed advocacy efforts for increased funding. **Maggie** distributed blue periwinkle cards to raise awareness about human trafficking and the need for \$1 million in funding. She had a conversation with Senator Scott Webster about the urgency of the cause. **Maggie** urged all board members to contact their Iowa State Senators before January to support the funding increase. **George** confirmed he has spoken with Senator Kara Warne who will be an advocate for their cause.

• Conclusion

- The next legislative committee meeting will be Tuesday, October 28th from 2:30-3:30 PM virtually.
- Board members committed to contacting their senators before January.

Trafficking statistics

John and George discussed the collection of human trafficking statistics. Teresa Davidson collected statistics from various agencies including Iowa Victims Call Center, Family Resource Hotline, National Human Trafficking Hotline, and Iowa Attorney General. **Tom** shared that he contacted the U.S. Attorney General's Office for the Southern District and obtained some statistics from Polaris. **George** created a chart with statistics that will be sent to all board members. **Shirley** suggested including information about direct services provided, such as days of care in residential facilities. **George** agreed to include statistics from individual agencies that provide direct services.

• Conclusion

- George will send the statistics chart to all providers and ask them to submit their stats.
- DHHS statistics are expected next week, and a representative will join the November meeting.

State Department TIP report

George provided an update on the Trafficking in Persons report. **George** said the report was due in June but was delayed and just released last week. The report covers 100+ countries and categorizes them into four tiers based on their efforts to combat trafficking. Countries in Tiers 3 and 4 are not enacting legislation to fight trafficking or train law enforcement.

• Conclusion

- George will include a summary and link to the report in the November 1st newsletter.
- The report indicates that human trafficking is escalating worldwide.

National Human Trafficking Hotline changes

Discussion about the change in the contract for the National Human Trafficking Hotline. **George said the** Polaris contract was not renewed by the federal government and was awarded to another organization. The new contractor, Compass Connections, may be required to report all cases to law enforcement regardless of survivor consent. **Bernadette** noted discrepancies in reported call volumes between Polaris and Compass Connections.

- **Conclusion**

- This change raises concerns about survivor confidentiality and may discourage survivors from calling the hotline.
- There's not much that can be done about the change at this point.

Treasurer's Report

George presented the financial report for September 2025. Income was only \$124.63 from online donors through PayPal. Expenses were \$620.20, with the largest expense being \$345 to Code and Content for website management. Tom Barr moved approval and Maggie Tinsman seconded. The report was unanimously approved by the board.

Fundraising Committee Report

Tom Barr provided an update on fundraising efforts. The fundraising goal is \$20,000 for the year, with just under \$10,000 raised by the end of August. Giving Tuesday is on December 2nd with a goal of \$7,500. John will send first-class letters to past donors with physical addresses, and Tom will email those with only email addresses. The organization is expanding its social media presence to reach younger audiences through LinkedIn and Instagram. **George** announced a challenge grant matching up to \$500 for Giving Tuesday donations. The board unanimously approved \$217.50 for additional t-shirts in sizes 2X and 3X. Karl moved the approval of the t-shirts and Chief Thein seconded. Tom encouraged board members to participate in Giving Tuesday and share fundraising information through their networks.

Website updates

George shared recent changes to the website. The website now has separate tabs for "Contact" and "Subscribe" to make it easier for people to reach out. The blog has 1,880 subscribers and continues to grow. Our webmaster Linda also: fixed a broken link for posters and added the new sticker with the Department of Public Safety tip line and removed email addresses of subcontractors from the website to prevent them from receiving trafficking-related inquiries.

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Recent trafficking arrests

George shared information about recent trafficking-related arrests in Iowa. Three traffickers were arrested in Iowa City in connection with illicit massage businesses. Records showed \$2.5 million had been laundered through these businesses. Charges included ongoing criminal conduct, money laundering, third-degree sexual abuse, pimping, and pandering for prostitution. **George** also shared a case of a 13-year-old Iowa girl who was groomed online through Roblox and taken to Tennessee where she was assaulted. These cases highlight the importance of internet safety education and the financial scale of trafficking operations.

Challenges

- Securing the \$1 million in funding for human trafficking survivor services from the Iowa legislature.
- Collecting comprehensive statistics from all agencies providing trafficking-related services.
- Addressing concerns about the new National Human Trafficking Hotline operator and potential impacts on survivor reporting.
- Increasing fundraising to meet the \$20,000 annual goal.
- Determining how to present information about the \$150,000 funding allocation without appearing negative.

Action items

• All board members

- Contact their Iowa State Senators about supporting \$1 million for human trafficking survivor services before January
- Participate in Giving Tuesday fundraising by December 2nd
- Share fundraising information through social media and personal networks

• John

- Forward the email with the blue card information to all board members
- Send first-class letters to past donors for Giving Tuesday
- Consult with Teresa Harms about how to present information regarding the \$150,000 funding allocation on the website

• George

- Send the trafficking statistics chart to all board members and service providers
- Include a summary of the TIP report in the November 1st newsletter
- Provide matching funds up to \$500 for Giving Tuesday donations

• Tom

- Send communications to donors with email addresses for Giving Tuesday
- Take the new t-shirts to the Civitas event in Des Moines

- **Sister Shirley**
 - Send statistics about Lila Mae's House services to George for inclusion in the report
- **Maddie**
 - Create a LinkedIn presence for the organization
- **Austin and John**
 - Explore Instagram options with United Way to reach younger audiences