

September 12th NAHT Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Alyse Hardin, George Belitsos, Maggie Tinsman, Deanna Jensen, Lyna Debner, Thomas Barr, Shirley Fineran, Bernadette Rixner, and Linda Harell

Excused Absence: Stephanie Olson and John Chesser

Absent: Mike Tupper and Jessica Hagin

Guests: Elizabeth Phan (Technology Consultant), Micheal McDonald (Attorney General's Office), Gretchen Brown-Waech (Attorney General's Office), Chelsea Hoyer (Legislative Liaison with Advocacy Strategies), and Shirlee Redding (Emeritus NAHT Board member)

I. Call to order and attendance

The meeting was called to order at 2:32 p.m. by Hardin, NAHT vice-chair. She introduced a new Tech Consultant who will be taking today's meeting minutes, Elizabeth Phan. Hardin introduces two guests Micheal McDonald and Gretchen Brown-Waech.

Hardin announced Grace Lohse's resignation from the board due to her busy schedule as a first-year University of Iowa college student. Grace may return to the Board in the future when her availability permits.

II. Updates on Staffing Changes to the AG's Office

Staffing changes at the Attorney General's office were announced by Micheal McDonald and Gretchen Brown Waech. Gretchen, the outgoing Trafficking Coordinator, discussed her new role overseeing various programs. She clarified that her focus would shift from human trafficking to coordinating training programs statewide. Attendees expressed their appreciation for Gretchen's service and welcomed Michael McDonald, who will be the AG's new point person for human trafficking. Belitsos thanked Gretchen for being a valuable resource and human trafficking trainer. Belitsos asked if Micheal would be picking up the trafficking training and if he would be attending the monthly NAHT Board meetings as Gretchen has done for the last six years. There followed a discussion regarding whether Gretchen and Michael should both be listed as human trafficking resources on the network's website and brochure. Micheal agreed to discuss this with their AG section chief and provide Belitsos with an update.

Hardin inquired about McDonald's training audience and whether human trafficking and sexual assault trainings would be integrated. McDonald explained that they were compiling a training catalog with various topics for different audiences. McDonald clarified that they welcome a multi-disciplinary audience and would offer topics based on the needs of specific locations. He would also invite local experts to provide training when necessary. He stated that he would not be providing training on human trafficking himself.

McDonald addressed the need for outreach and training on sexual assault in locations where there may not be local resources available. He suggested reaching out to other organizations across the state for support. Hardin mentioned the availability of the law enforcement academy as a resource for community training. The group discussed the challenges of availability and capacity due to funding cuts and the high demand for direct services for survivors.

After considerable discussion, this portion of the meeting concluded with the agreement for Michael to continue receiving board agendas and handouts, attending meetings, and serving as the liaison with the AG's office. Gretchen's potential continued involvement will be explored further. She described her understanding that the position of Human Trafficking Coordinator had been eliminated.

III. Consent agenda items

Hardin asked if there was discussion or any amendments to the August 8th Board meeting minutes or the treasurer's report. Belitsos reviewed the sources of August donations and thanked Barr for solicitation of several gifts. Belitsos also highlighted a drop in income since last month but noted a significant \$1,000 gift from Sarah Johnson and a \$148.28 gift from the American Giving Foundation. There were also several donations (\$140.00) from individual Facebook donors for Belitsos's birthday.

There were no further discussions and Hardin moved to approve both the August meeting minutes and the treasurer's report. Tinsman seconded it. **Both the minutes and the treasurer's report were approved unanimously.**

IV. Research Committee Update

This agenda item was skipped due to the absence of the committee chair.

V. Report from Advocacy Strategies

Hoye discussed an upcoming meeting with the Legislative Council, scheduled for September 14th, where approval and appointment to the Human Trafficking Interim Study Committee would be sought. Hoye identified Representative Brian Losey as the chair of the Interim Study Committee, emphasizing the smooth process expected due to this appointment. Hoye also noted positive interactions with key legislators, such as Representatives Steve Holt and Gary Moore. She informed the legislators about the need to secure an additional \$5 million for a total of \$10 million budget allocation for the victim's services budget to include Human Trafficking.

Tinsman shared her conversation with Representative Gary Moore, who expressed support for allocating additional funds to victim services. Fineran also shared her recent interactions with legislators. Hoye emphasized the importance of board members advocating for the survivor's service organization's funding, especially in light of potential victim services federal funding cuts.

Barr raised the question of how upcoming elections might impact legislative efforts. Hoye shared her insights, suggesting that there likely will not be significant changes in the legislative landscape. There was a discussion about potential shifts in the political

climate. Rixner suggested the possibility of establishing a state government coalition against human trafficking. Hardin mentioned the importance of ensuring that any coalition serves its intended purpose.

Fineran mentioned a willingness to visit with legislators in Des Moines or another location to talk to people if there was an opportunity or a major event. Fineran also noted that her organization had recently hired an executive director who would start next week. However, Fineran expressed concerns about reopening Lila Mays House due to a lack of funds to pay staff. Tinsman offered to accompany Fineran despite not being a service provider herself.

Fineran mentioned that the executive director position at their organization was funded through a grant from their religious community. She acknowledged the challenges of sustaining funding for salaries, especially given the current expectations for pay in the field. McDonald inquired about the location of the property mentioned earlier, to which Fineran responded that it's in Sioux City. Fineran discussed her efforts to raise awareness by speaking to the community and student groups and the importance of educating people about the realities of human trafficking. She recently spoke to 500 students in Carroll, Iowa. She mentioned that many people have misconceptions about the issue. Hardin expressed the need for continued outreach and advocacy.

McDonald was asked again about human trafficking training and he responded that the training he presents is only on sexual assault. Fineran shared information about Rejuvenating Women in Omaha, Nebraska starting a ranch for girls aged 12 to 18. She noted that the property had been acquired and would be used as a new resource for survivors.

VI. Discussion about Survivors serving on the Study Committee

Hardin will serve as the NAHT representative on the Human Trafficking Interim Study Committee. Belitsos brought up the need to find two survivors to also serve on the Interim Study Committee. The NAHT requested that the legislature include survivors on the organization bill.

Hardin raised concerns about the potential impact on survivors' well-being and the need for trauma-informed support. She stated that any survivor involvement should be voluntary and that paid compensation should be considered. Belitsos agreed but doubted that the legislature would pay for a survivor's service. He reminded the board that we added compensations for survivor's service to the NAHT By-laws. He then suggested that the NAHT Board consider paying the survivors. He stated that the Legislative Council is unlikely to name a survivor to the Study Committee and will likely turn to the NAHT for recommendations.

Belitos mentioned that Heather Brown's name came up at Tuesday's executive committee meeting. Brown has served in the Legislative Advocacy Committee and the NAHT Board. She was one of three survivors featured on the Gridslock documentary. She has done many speaking engagements. Hardin expressed concerns about asking

Heather Brown and expressed the belief that the NAHT should not recommend anyone due to the possible harm.

VII. Additional Funding Opportunities

During the Advocacy Strategy report, Belitsos brought up a possible funding opportunity as a result of additional tobacco settlement funds. They mentioned that a recent legal victory had secured an additional \$171 million over the next six years. This prompted a discussion about the possibility of redirecting some of these funds toward human trafficking victim services. The court case with Big Tobacco was initiated by the former Attorney General, Tom Miller six years ago. These funds are not included in the 2023 legislation appropriation bills. Belitsos proposed the NAHT approach to Attorney General Berg with the request that she add \$5 million to her victim service budget proposal and suggest that it come from the \$171 million in tobacco funds.

Hoye acknowledged the legal constraints but indicated that efforts would be made to engage in discussions with the Attorney General's office regarding potential additional funding reallocations.

Belitsos asked Micheal McDonald if he would support the 5 million in additional victim services funding. He responded that he would support the additional 5 million especially if it included services to victims of sex trafficking.

VIII. Legislative Committee Update (Maggie Tinsman, George Belitsos)

Tinsman read the legislative agenda for 2024 as approved at a meeting of the Legislative Advocacy Committee on Thursday, August 31st, and discussed at last Tuesday's Executive Committee.

The three legislative agenda items follow in order of priority:

1. Requesting \$10 million total in funding for victim services from the legislature. This is a 5 million total increase. The appropriation budget must include human trafficking services.
2. Advocating for expungement and vacatur for trafficking survivors.
3. Supporting recommendations from the Human Trafficking Interim Study Committee.

The NAHT will also support these two Policy Statements:

- Backing legislation requiring schools to provide child sex abuse awareness and prevention education for students, parents, and school employees.
- Supporting legislation for safe filter technology to protect minors from harmful online content.

Belitsos moved and Tinsman seconded a motion of the Board to approve the 2024 legislative agenda as proposed by the Legislative Advocacy Committee.

Hardin expressed strong support for the number one funding priority, emphasizing the critical need for state funding to provide services to trafficking survivors. She raised concerns about having three priorities on the legislative agenda and suggested focusing on number one as the one and only priority. Hardin said that she did not want this motion to be voted on until she had the chance to speak to chair John Chesser. Two board members said there was a committee motion on the floor and that a vote still needs to be taken.

Finneran said she agreed with Hardin and asked if there was a quorum, A count showed that there was a quorum. Hardin again discussed the importance of the funding priority and should be the only priority and disagreed with the commuter motion. She expressed deep concerns about the limited resources and the need to focus on the only one priority. She asked the board the question- what would you say to a survivor who could not get service due to a lack of funding?

After a lengthy discussion among the board members, there was a call for a vote on the motion to approve the 2024 legislative agenda as recommended by the Legislative Advocacy Committee. **The roll call vote results were as follows:**

Yes: George Belitsos, Thomas Barr, Maggie Tinsman, Linda Harrell, Lyna Debner

No: Alyse Hardin, Deanna Jensen, Shirley Fineran

The motion passed with 5 votes in favor and 3 votes against. The legislative priorities for 2024 thereby stood approved as recommended by the Legislative Advocacy Committee. Hardin commented that the no vote by two service providers reminded her of the past board split votes and that the providers are not being heard by the rest of the board.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:51 p.m.