

THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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U.S. Attorney Chris Christie and NJ Attorney General Anne Milgram Discuss Human Trafficking At Stockton's Hughes Center Event

**Law Enforcement Education, Community Involvement
Seen as Keys to Curb "Modern Slavery"**

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Atlantic City, NJ – Human trafficking, a growing concern throughout New Jersey, the United States and the world, was discussed last night in a forum sponsored by Stockton College's William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.

A panel featuring U.S. Attorney Chris Christie and New Jersey Attorney General Anne Milgram packed a lecture hall at Stockton's Carnegie Library Center in Atlantic City with invited guests including county prosecutors, law enforcement officials and representatives of social services agencies determined to aid trafficking victims.

New Jersey Network's Kent Manahan, who moderated the panel, said the U.S. State Department estimates human trafficking is a \$32 billion criminal enterprise worldwide involving between 15,000 to 18,000 victims each year in the United States alone. Worldwide, the estimate is more than two million victims annually.

"There is no polite way to say it, human trafficking amounts to slavery," Christie said. "It is uniquely heartbreaking. The victims are the vulnerable people: often they are impoverished women from other cultures who don't speak English, uneducated and motivated by trying to help their families. The perpetrators running these criminal enterprises are evil – exploiting human beings for profit."

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Milgram said New Jersey's diversity and unique geography created a natural breeding ground for trafficking humans. "Anywhere you see a large amount of prostitution, it is safe to assume there is some human trafficking involved," she said. "But there are more subtle forms such as domestic servitude. In our rural areas, migrant farm workers are among the victims."

She said foreign victims are courted by traffickers who promise a better life in America. Once here, the victims' identification is taken, they are forced into various forms of slavery and intimidated from notifying authorities. "Frequently they are from cultures where law enforcement is more corrupt than the political system," Christie said. "Their captors may hold their children or other family members and threaten their safety."

The forum, part of a discussion series sponsored by the Hughes Center, was organized by former New Jersey Senator William Gormley and the Hughes Center, the College's new public policy think tank.

"This event is what we do: take serious issues and discuss them with the public and the policy makers to help formulate future actions," Center Director Sharon Schulman said. "We also conduct public policy research, as well as political polling and issue-oriented polling."

As part of the talk, Milgram discussed a case involving a sophisticated sex trafficking ring in which young girls were lured out of rural Mexico and forced into the sex trade in Brooklyn and Queens in New York City. More than 50 girls were victimized in the scheme, which continued through two trips to Mexico by Milgram, a large measure of international diplomacy and much investigative work. The ring was finally smashed when one of the victims convinced others to trust the investigators.

"My first trip to Mexico was one of the most frustrating periods in my career," Milgram said, because of the lack of cooperation of local officials. But new federal laws, which tie financial aid and diplomatic status to foreign countries to their cooperation, helped lead to arrests in the case. Milgram said the threat of Mexico being added to the "watch list" of countries aiding traffickers, turned the tide in the investigation. "Suddenly we were invited back to Mexico and provided with all the resources we needed," she said.

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Christie said local law enforcement often misses the human trafficking element in prostitution and other crimes because signs can be very subtle. Thus enforcement officials may deal with the symptom of prostitution and not the main disease of trafficking.

“If you drop Eastern European people into the middle of Lincoln, Nebraska they would stand out, but if you dropped them in New York, Philadelphia or a lot of places in New Jersey there would be many other people who speak the same language. Law enforcement might not take notice.”

Milgram mentioned another case where a woman was placed into domestic servitude for seven years and hardly ever left the house. “You can’t blame the neighbors because they never saw the victim.” She said. “You can blame the visitors to the house over the years who knew this woman was working there and looked unhealthy and undernourished.”

Milgram praised the human services agencies for the work they do in bringing traffickers to justice. “The real heroes are these agencies who find shelter and jobs for the victims so they can stay and testify in court cases, and the victims themselves for having the courage to testify,” Milgram added.

According to Christie and Milgram, there are specific steps law enforcement officials and members of the public can take to curb human trafficking:

- Law enforcement officials should look beneath the surface of prostitution and other crimes for signs of trafficking
- Members of the public should call the U.S., Attorney’s office or the office of the State Attorney General if they suspect trafficking. “One person’s idea of trafficking might be another person’s idea of harboring.” Christie said. People shouldn’t have to make that distinction; they should call and leave it to us.”
- Education of trafficking patterns and practices should be increased to boost awareness of the problem.

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