



Commission on the Status of Women

ACTION CALENDAR
March 18, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Commission on the Status of Women
 Submitted By: Carole Marasovic, Chairperson, Commission on the Status of Women
 Subject: Formation of a Sex Trafficking Task Force to Address Current Sex Trafficking in Berkeley

RECOMMENDATION

To recommend to Council to refer to the City Manager to form a sex trafficking task force. The Task Force's objective shall be two-fold: to develop recommendations of sex trafficking prevention strategies to be implemented including through social media and to provide recommendations for supports for women and girls seeking to exit sex trafficking.

That the Task Force be comprised as follows: 2 members of the Commission on the Status of Women (1 of whom will be a UC Berkeley student); 1-2 members of the Berkeley Police Department formerly or currently working on this issue in Berkeley as determined by the Berkeley Police Department; 2 members of the 2x2 Committee (1 of whom shall be a Councilmember and 1 of whom shall be a School Board member); 1 member of the City of Berkeley Youth Commission who is a Berkeley High School student; 1 person with knowledge and expertise in sex trafficking, prevention and resources, that person unidentified with a Berkeley City-funded agency so as to avoid any potential conflict of interest in the recommendations; 1 woman with a history of having been sex-trafficked (a stipend is recommended for that member of the Task Force); and 1 person with expertise in workplace development and related economic resources.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

No final action was taken by Health, Life Enrichment, Equity & Community Policy Committee. Item is automatically returning to the Council agenda pursuant to time limit for items referred to policy committees.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

The fiscal impacts of this recommendation are best determined by staff.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Commission on the Status of Women heard from several speakers on sex trafficking in Berkeley including a FBI Special Agent entrusted with pursuing human trafficking in Berkeley. That FBI Special Agent disclosed that in the last 3 years, 12 sex trafficking operations were prosecuted in Berkeley.

Since the last time these issues were explored through a Task Force in Berkeley, that being with City Council forming a task force in 2012 which concluded in 2013, the landscape has changed. The previous Task Force resulted in the Berkeley Police Department's closure of Berkeley massage parlors.

Currently, the presence of sex trafficking in Berkeley has moved away from the streets and massage parlors, into more covert operations. These operations often are transacted through social media.

Contrary to what may be commonly believed, the FBI Special Agent advised the Commission that no social or economic class was precluded from being recruited into sex trafficking.

The Commission on the Status of Women also heard from MISSYE, a support organization in Oakland, for girls and women exiting sex trafficking. Last, the Commission heard from an expert in human trafficking with extensive experience in working on cases with women and girls in Contra Costa County and Marin County, also having worked on a cross-jurisdictional case in collaboration with the Berkeley Police Department. She disclosed that she has worked on cases with victims as young as 2 years old.

BACKGROUND

On April 17, 2024, the Commission on the Status of Women passed a motion as follows:

To recommend to Council to refer to the City Manager to form a sex trafficking task force. The Task Force's objective shall be two-fold: to develop recommendations of sex trafficking prevention strategies to be implemented including through social media and to provide recommendations for supports for women and girls seeking to exit sex trafficking.

That the Task Force be comprised as follows: 2 members of the Commission on the Status of Women (1 of whom will be a UC Berkeley student); 2 members of the Berkeley Police Department formerly or currently working on this issue in Berkeley; 2 members of the 2x2 Committee (1 of whom shall be a Councilmember and 1 of whom shall be a School Board member); 1 member of the City of Berkeley Youth Commission who is a Berkeley High School student; 1 person with knowledge and expertise in sex trafficking, prevention and resources, that person unidentified with a Berkeley City-

funded agency so as to avoid any potential conflict of interest in the recommendations; 1 woman with a history of having been sex-trafficked (a stipend is recommended for that member of the Task Force); and 1 person with expertise in workplace development and related economic resources.

M/S/C: Marasovic, Ortiz-Cedeno

Ayes: Goodwin, Marasovic, Oliver, Ortiz-Cedeno, Posey, Seshagiri

Noes: None

Abstain:

Absent: Arora

Leave of Absence: Boyd, Plese

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no known identifiable environmental effects.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information received, the Commission on the Status of Women believes that it is advisable to form another sex trafficking task force to address current concerns around sex trafficking prevention strategies and supports for women and girls seeking to exit sex trafficking.

The landscape has changed. With 12 sex trafficking operations prosecuted in Berkeley in the last 3 years, the Commission believes that sex trafficking should be addressed locally through prevention strategies, particularly through social media which as a double-edged sword can be used both positively and negatively and through supports for women and girls needing resources to successfully exit sex trafficking in a safe, humane, supportive manner.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

The only alternative is to not address the issue.

CITY MANAGER

This initiative is not in the Health, Housing and Community Services Department's work plan and it would be challenging to redirect resources to this work in the near future. The City Manager recommends that the Commission develop a subcommittee to identify recommendations of sex trafficking prevention strategies including through social media and to provide recommendations for supports for women and girls seeking to exit sex trafficking.

Formation of a Sex Trafficking Task Force
to Address Current Sex Trafficking in Berkeley

ACTION CALENDAR
March 18, 2025

CONTACT PERSON

Okeya Vance-Dozier, Commission Secretary, City Manager's Office, (510) 981-7239