



Commission on the
Status of Women

Commission on the Status of Women
Wednesday, September 17, 2025 – 7:00pm
North Berkeley Senior Center
1901 Hearst Ave, Berkeley, CA 94709

REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

Mayor Adena Ishii:

Rashi Kersarwani:

Terry Taplin:

Shante' Baker

Ben Bartlett:

Igor Tregub

Shoshana O'Keefe

Kameka Goodwin

Shirley Posey

Kera Binns

Brent Blackaby:

Cecilia Lunaparra:

Mark Humbert

Dianna Mullins

Najuna Kiggundu

Peggy Scott

All items are for discussion and possible action.

1. Roll Call.
2. Reading of Land Acknowledgment.
3. Public Comments for Items not on the Agenda.
4. Approval of the Agenda. Discussion Only.
5. Approval of the July 16, 2025 minutes. Discussion and Action.
6. Presentation: Paths to Stability: Supporting Women Experiencing Homelessness in Berkeley
7. Chair Update Discussion Only.
8. Staff Update Discussion Only.
9. Leaders Provide Update on the Work Plan Focus Areas and Goals. Discussion Only.
10. Adjourn.

 **ADA Disclaimer** “This meeting is being held in a wheelchair accessible location. To request a disability-related accommodation(s) to participate in the meeting, including auxiliary aids or services, please contact the Disability Services Specialist at 981-6418 (V) or 981-6347 (TDD) at least five business days before the meeting date. Please refrain from wearing scented products to this meeting.”

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SB 343 Disclaimer

Any writings or documents provided to a majority of the Commission regarding any item on this agenda will be made available for public inspection at the City Manager's Office located at 2180 Milvia Street, 5th Floor.

Commission Contact Information

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Land Acknowledgement Statement

The City of Berkeley recognizes that the community we live in was built on the territory of xučyun (Huchiun (Hooch-yoon)), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo (Cho-chen-yo)-speaking Ohlone (Oh-low-nee) people, the ancestors and descendants of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to all of the Ohlone Tribes and descendants of the Verona Band. As we begin our meeting tonight, we acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants of Berkeley, the documented 5,000-year history of a vibrant community at the West Berkeley Shellmound, and the Ohlone people who continue to reside in the East Bay. We recognize that Berkeley's residents have and continue to benefit from the use and occupation of this unceded stolen land since the City of Berkeley's incorporation in 1878. As stewards of the laws regulating the City of Berkeley, it is not only vital that we recognize the history of this land, but also recognize that the Ohlone people are present members of Berkeley and other East Bay communities today. The City of Berkeley will continue to build relationships with the Lisjan Tribe and to create meaningful actions that uphold the intention of this land acknowledgement.



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July 16, 2025

DRAFT MINUTES

The meeting convened at 7:04 pm with Kera Binns (Chair) presiding. Okeya Vance-Dozier, Secretary.

SECTION A. PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1. **Roll Call**

Present: Binns, Kiggundu, Posey, Scott, Goodwin

Absent:

Excused: Mullins

Leave of Absence:

2. **Announcements**

None

3. **Comments from the Public**

Public Attendance:

Public Comments:

4. **Review and approval of meeting minutes**

Approved minutes from 06/18/25.

M/S/C: Goodwin, Binns

Ayes: Binns, Kiggundu, Posey, Scott, Goodwin

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent:

Excused: Mullins

5. **Commission Updates & Chairperson's Report (No Action Taken):**

Secretary's Report (No Action Taken)

SECTION B. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

4. Presentation: “How Women Can Use GenAI to Create Better Lives and Workplaces”- Stephen Klein

No Action Taken.

M/S/C:

Ayes:

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent:

Excused:

5. Leaders Provide Update on the Work Plan Focus Areas and Goals. Discussion Only.

No Action Taken.

M/S/C:

Ayes:

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent:

Excused:

SECTION C. COMMUNICATIONS

6. No communications received prior to meeting.

SECTION D. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:01 PM.

M/S/C: Binns, Posey

Ayes: Binns, Goodwin, Kiggundu, Posey, Scott

Noes:

Abstain:

Absent:

Excused:

Respectfully Submitted,

Okeya Vance-Dozier, Secretary
Peace and Justice Commission

PUBLIC SAFETY

Q&A: How Oakland schools educate youth about the dangers of human trafficking

Oakland is an epicenter of sex and labor exploitation. OUSD schools teach students to trust their guts when something doesn't feel right.



by **Roselyn Romero**

Sept. 3, 2025, 5:00 p.m.



Amba Johnson, a former welfare worker and longtime advocate for sexually exploited youth, is the manager for Oakland Unified School District's human trafficking prevention & response program. Credit: Roselyn Romero/The Oaklandside

In 2020, eight school districts across the U.S. received a total of \$4.3 million in federal grants to create and implement human trafficking prevention programs. Oakland Unified was one of them.

If you or someone you know is a survivor of human trafficking, help is available. You can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or text “HELP” to 233733.

The Oakland nonprofit MISSEY operates a drop-in center from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, at 1800 55th Ave. For more information, email info@missey.org.

OUSD receives half a million dollars a year from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide human trafficking prevention education to students and staff in middle and high schools. Teams of community school managers, therapists, and other staff trained to respond and intervene in cases of commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking are at each middle and high school campus.

Amba Johnson, a former welfare worker for foster youth and a longtime advocate for sexually exploited youth, is OUSD’s grant manager for its human trafficking prevention & response program.

The Oaklandside recently sat down with Johnson to learn about what human trafficking looks like and how parents and guardians can talk with their students about exploitation.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity, with some editor’s notes to provide additional context.

I want to be mindful of language. Can you define “human trafficking” for me? And what’s the preferred terminology for survivors, victims, etc.?

Human trafficking is a blanket term that covers all forms of exploitation, including labor trafficking and commercial sex trafficking. Each one brings an entirely different set of challenges, so it’s important to be specific.

All survivors have different preferences for how they’d like to be referred to. Some people want to be identified as victims or survivors. Others are OK with both. Some don’t want to be identified as either.

The federal government’s definition of human trafficking includes the use of force, fraud, or coercion. That’s particularly relevant if you’re talking to someone over 18. The thing about youth under 18 is that force, fraud, and coercion don’t have to be present if the act is, by definition, a crime. We’ve decided as a society that the capacity for informed consent isn’t possible until age 18, because [children] don’t have enough of a worldview to understand that consent. So in real terms, that means it’s automatically a crime if someone is in a relationship with someone else, and the other person is benefiting from them being sold to a third party.

How did you get started in trafficking prevention and education?

I was in the sex industry in my 20s. I was not being exploited; I was an adult. And it should be noted that I'm white, so there was a lot of privilege in that. I'm not claiming parallel experience, but I have experience nonetheless.

I left the sex industry and went to college pretty late — I was 26 or 27 — because I had a daughter, and as a single mother, I needed to get a job. I got my bachelor's in sociology and my master's in social work.

After college, I worked for the Alameda County Social Services Agency as a welfare worker for children in group homes. I wasn't there for very long before I became aware that a number of the girls were being exploited.

I was shocked at the terminology back in those days. In some of the case files, a 12-year-old would be referred to as "having a lot of boyfriends" or "promiscuous." They classified teens as "prostitutes." The teens themselves thought that whatever they were doing was entirely their fault. They didn't understand how controlled and frightened they were. They discounted their own fears, the manipulation, the control they were under.

Editor's note: In 2016, California lawmakers passed Senate Bill 1322, which decriminalized prostitution and related charges for minors and directed police to treat children as victims. Before SB 1322, police could arrest and charge minors for prostitution and loitering with intent to commit prostitution.

I met Nola Brantley in 2001. She was working as a case manager at the George P. Scotlan Youth and Family Center in West Oakland and had already started working with two or three other women on commercial sexual exploitation prevention and education. Nola led the way for many years, nationally and locally. I was the president of MISSEY's board of directors for several years.

I left Alameda County Social Services and started consulting with group homes on how to work with youth who were human trafficking survivors. Eventually, I was recruited by Alameda Family Services to be the director of DreamCatcher Youth Services. At the time, they were planning on moving to a new building and opening a specialized shelter for trafficked youth. I came on board in 2013 and did that until we merged with Covenant House in 2024.

Those years were particularly salient because we had already worked for so long on increasing awareness, and more youth were coming in because they'd heard about DreamCatcher through word of mouth.

Oakland Unified School District houses a human trafficking prevention program. Is this typical at other school districts?

OUSD is one of eight school districts nationwide to receive the Human Trafficking Youth Prevention Education (HTYPE) grant. We're using the same human trafficking education program that the Los Angeles and San Diego Unified School Districts use.

Editor's note: The Office on Trafficking in Persons, housed within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, awarded the HTYPE grants. The Administration for Children and Families took down its HTYPE website earlier this year.



The Oakland Unified School District headquarters in West Oakland. Credit: Junggho Kim for The Oaklandside

Is there a particular reason OUSD was selected to receive this grant out of the thousands of school districts across the country?

First of all, we wrote a very competitive grant application. Second, Oakland is ranked No. 3 in human trafficking hot spots in California. I believe San Diego is No. 1, and San Jose is No. 2.

Editor's note: County records refer to Alameda County as the third-highest ranking hot spot for human trafficking in the U.S. The records do not cite a source for that statistic; however, it's generally recognized that many people in the East Bay are victims of labor and sex trafficking.

How prevalent is human trafficking locally?

I want to say something about statistics because you're going to find a lot of them. Research and logic suggest that any statistic you see on human trafficking represents between 3% and 10% of the actual number.

Let's start with commercial sex trafficking. We get data through three points of contact: police (if they reported it to the police or went to a police station), nonprofits (if they sought services from a shelter or some other organization), and hotlines (if they called a crisis line). Nearly all survivors of commercial sex trafficking, active and former, are not going to do any of those three things because they're being managed by people who aren't inclined to let them have those contacts. In other words, people who report being exploited are the exception, not the rule.

Labor trafficking is very similar, but with a whole different level of dynamics. Labor trafficking often involves the immediate threat to family in this country or another country, or the threat of taking away the person's green card or other pathways to citizenship. Also, many first- and second-generation immigrants tend to fear the police because, depending on the country you came from, police can mean different things. That means there's an even lower likelihood of a touch point with these victims.

Many survivors of sexual assault I've spoken to said they didn't report it.

Yeah. They'll say, "I'm not putting myself through that. I've been through enough."

How much funding does OUSD get? What exactly does the funding cover?

OUSD receives \$500,000 a year. The first grant period was for 2018 through 2023. We are entering the third year of our second, five-year grant period, which ends in 2028.

The federal grant covers all types of human trafficking education and involves everyone in the school district. We're working on getting protective and preventative curriculum in all the schools, from fifth grade up. We're training all teachers in identifying trafficking.

This year, for the first time, we'll be training all the support teams, social workers, community school managers, the coordinated support teams on each campus, and everyone else who is going to work more deeply with the youth. They are going to be trained more in service delivery and how to work with someone involved in human trafficking.

The majority of the grant is getting the curriculum into the classrooms, paying the trainers' salaries, the curriculum development — all of that is very pricey. On top of that, the grant covers technical support and expanding bandwidth.

When there is a human trafficking case in any school, I'm the one they consult about it. We talk about strategies, linking the student to outside support, and when and how to take that support.

What other topics do you cover?

For this five-year cycle, we're very focused on additional curriculum development for parents and guardians. We're also working on deepening the understanding of labor trafficking of boys, with a particular focus on forced criminality.

What is forced criminality?

Forced criminality is when someone is forced to break the law. One example is a gang forcing a boy to be part of the gang. They might coerce the boy to sell illegal goods or force them to go into stores and run credit cards. These actions are often driven by an adult who is in control.

This is more likely to happen to newly arrived immigrants. They're not thinking, "I'm going to go to America to join a gang." That couldn't be further from the truth. Oftentimes, they're running *to* America to avoid a gang. But then they get here, and America also has gangs waiting for them. And being first- or second-generation comes with a lot of barriers. You might not fully understand your rights or what's going on.

When we talk about forced criminality, it feels like we're back in 2002 or 2003, when sex trafficking survivors were still treated as criminals, not victims. Back then, we had not named that those minors were being forced to do something that they weren't autonomously deciding to do as an informed adult.

Likewise, in forced criminality, these boys aren't making a choice. They have no choice. They're being forced to sell drugs, steal, or whatever it is they're doing.

I've done some reporting on why the risk of being exploited is higher for some demographic groups. What patterns do you see, if any, among survivors of labor trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation?

For commercial sex trafficking, the biggest pattern we see now is that the recruiting is happening through social media, which I think everybody is acutely and painfully aware of.

Going to college, for me, was a big deal because I have attention deficit disorder. I didn't think that I was smart. Incidentally, that's something very typical of the youth I see on the streets. I see a lot of sexually exploited youth with mild learning disabilities or neurodivergences, which result in them thinking they're not smart or not going to make it the "regular" way.

In the case of labor trafficking, it's a little more complicated. If a family of five has their children helping them sell produce on the weekend, that is not labor trafficking; that is a family surviving. Ironically, it could also be that the entire family is being labor trafficked by someone else.

In terms of other trends, I would say trafficking is increasing in every way. I'm 20 years into working on this issue, but the truth is that all illegal industries are driven by money. If the money's bad, the money's bad, and you do what

you need to do to get by.

Tell me more about that.

There's the literal lack of resources, and there's the impending fear of lack of resources. Both of those make people more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Something about men on the street who are exploiting youth is that oftentimes, they were also groomed. That's a nuance that hasn't been addressed as much — that these exploiters consistently have almost the exact same background as the girls who are on the streets. They often experienced the same levels of sexual abuse, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and family instability. It's not like they walk out the door at 18 after a great high school education and say, "This is what I'm going to do."

Some men are trying to normalize their own experience by normalizing it with everyone around them, which means they're praising boys for exploitative behavior. Combine that with hopelessness and the fear of a lack of resources, and you have a perfect storm.

Depending on where you are in the U.S., between 70% and 90% of survivors of commercial sexual exploitation are Black or brown women. Similarly, between 70% and 90% of the men exploiting them are Black or brown.

But here's the thing: Almost anywhere you go in the country, close to 95% of buyers are white. So, who's the exploiter: the desperate person, the person who has the power to buy the desperate person, or the person who has the power to make someone desperate enough to sell a person?

Editor's note: Some studies have found that the largest demographic group buying sex from sex workers and exploited adults and youth are white men.

What resources does OUSD offer to trafficking survivors? And how many students seek out these services each year?

There's a coordinated services team on every OUSD campus. That team might consist of the community school manager, a behavioral health specialist, a therapist, the vice principal, and other non-teaching positions who work more deeply with families and students. They can issue referrals and link students to external support.

I think the data on how many students are referred to these services is still unclear. Some referrals are indeed for human trafficking, and others aren't. Before people are trained to identify trafficking, they don't see it, and after they're trained, they see it everywhere.

So is it fair to say there's no good data on how many OUSD students are being trafficked or at risk of being trafficked?

There is no strong, consistent data yet. I hesitate to give numbers because nine times out of 10, there is no overt indicator of trafficking. If a youth has been struggling for a very long time, there may not even be a dramatic change in behavior.

What are some possible signs of trafficking that students, teachers, and families should be aware of?

Two phones is the most famous sign, because the exploiter will often get a second phone to control the girl. But nowadays, they might use their own phone, so it depends on how long the exploiter has been doing this and how sophisticated he is in the way he manages the girls, which isn't always the case.

Sudden changes of behavior always have to be noted and responded to, because something might be going on. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's human trafficking.

I have never had any child in 20 years — not one teen — come up to me and say, "I'm being exploited." And even after she learns that language, that's never the language she would use. You have to practically be an adult before you're willing to say you were exploited. It's too abstract. So instead, they'll have "boyfriends."

Then, the challenge becomes more complicated. If they are being sexually exploited, they're either not going to disclose it because of fear or because their family has been threatened, or they won't disclose it because they don't think they're being exploited.

They may think they've got their one person, and if they don't have him, they won't have anything.

Or they'll think, "He really loves me, and we're going to get out of this together. I'm just helping us get out of this."

All these emotions are very intense when you're young because you're not at the same level of cognitive awareness as an adult.

The most common time for a teen to be exploited is between 12 and 14 years old. That's when many girls want to be visible in a whole new way, and when they are the least confident about it. So when a grown man tells them, "You're really mature for your age. You could be a model. We can make an incredible life together. Why don't you let me help you?" or, "I get the feeling you're not having a good time at home. I could make sure that nobody ever hurts you again," that can make them feel safe, protected, and loved.

Editor's note: OUSD provides a [list of indicators of human trafficking](#).

It sounds like you're describing the "boyfriend pimp." I'm also aware of "gorilla pimps," who use physical violence, drugs, or both to coerce someone into sexual exploitation. Are they not as common among the cases you've seen at OUSD?

Nope, not as common.

I'm also noticing you've mostly referred to survivors as girls and exploiters as men.

Yes. That's not always true, but it tends to be.

Editor's note: Research has overwhelmingly shown that most exploiters are men.

Let's say a student walks into your office and reports that they know someone who is being sexually exploited. Walk me through a typical response in that scenario.

I'll give you one example. A teacher calls and says, "This girl comes to school, she's gone for two hours at lunchtime, and then she comes back," or, "The other day, I noticed that the guy who picked her up from school wasn't her dad, but I didn't have a chance to say anything because she was at the other end of the parking lot."

I would ask them, can you check in with her more often?

Try to form a stronger connection.

Make more time to talk and say, "It seems like you're gone for a couple of hours every day. Is there anything you need?"

Some youth will disclose pretty quickly that they need to go to a clinic, or they have a boyfriend. But most youth will say, "No, I'm OK."

Youth will disclose if they're being approached in the early grooming stages, and they know that something is off. That's why our prevention curriculum is so focused on getting them to identify when something's just not right and how to respond to that. We teach them to recognize it, respond to it, and find a safe adult.

Commercial sexual exploitation, let alone sex, is an uncomfortable topic for many people. How early should teachers, parents, and guardians talk about this with their students?

It's certainly a debate that has many dimensions to it.

The curriculum starts in kindergarten with obvious things, like safe touch. You don't need to hug someone if you don't want to. You can say "No."

We also do some skills building on recognizing safe adults. How do you figure out who to trust? How can you tell who is or isn't a safe adult?

When they get to fifth or sixth grade, that's when you might show them an age-appropriate video that talks about what grooming looks like. Start a conversation with your youth while you watch it. Use a very neutral, open tone. Ask, "Has that ever happened to you?" You can say, "If any of these things come up, you can tell me about it, and we can figure out if it really is grooming or not."

I love what you just said about keeping your tone open and neutral. Shame or blame can shut down any conversation.

Yep. Some generations didn't talk about sex, ever. Back then, you had the sex talk before you got married. I think we're in a particularly sensitive transition because we just went through a cultural period of tremendous freedom and sex positivity. And then AIDS happened, and somehow, everybody internalized that to mean that having sex freely could possibly be wrong and dangerous.

The problem with all of that is that there are people out there who are groomers. There are people online who are asking very young girls to send naked pictures to them. If we can't have conversations without shame, we have eliminated their only safety. And if and when they do something, and there is shame, implied or openly stated, then they won't have anybody to go to anymore. Shame is the thing that's going to hold them back.

Do you have any other tips?

Introducing conversations about human trafficking doesn't even have to happen before 14 or 15 years old. What has to happen is showing what grooming behaviors are and what the risks are. And teach them to always pay attention to their gut. Reassure them, tell them, "You can come to me with everything."

Those are prevention factors.