

NEWS

Moore & Van Allen Announces Human Trafficking Pro Bono Project

FIRM LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO COMBAT MODERN-DAY SLAVERY; HOSTS TRAINING WITH NATIONAL TRAFFICKING EXPERT FOR LAWYERS AND VICTIM ADVOCATES

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An estimated 20.9 million people are trafficked around the world today, according to the International Labor Organization, a leading international organization in the global fight against human trafficking. The National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline, operated by the Polaris Project, reported that North Carolina has the 12th highest call volume in the nation. Charlotte is prime territory for trafficking, largely due to its international airport, multiple interstate highways and geographic location. Many local victims have always lived in Charlotte. Far too many are children.

Recognizing the significant legal needs of local trafficking victims, Moore & Van Allen Conflicts Counsel Sarah Byrne and Global Services Paralegal Sally Hentz launched the Firm's Human Trafficking Pro Bono Project in late 2013. MVA officially announced the project this month, commencing formal efforts with a two-hour CLE training on the representation of trafficking victims in federal court. Martina E. Vandenberg, Founder and President of The Human Trafficking Pro Bono Legal Center, served as the keynote speaker, presenting on the importance of criminal restitution and civil judgments for trafficking survivors.

The lawyers and legal support personnel at MVA have both the capabilities and resources necessary to provide victims of this crime with pro bono representation. Byrne and Hentz, along with Manager of Diversity and Community Initiatives Stephanie Gryder, took it upon themselves to lead this initiative. The Firm's Human Trafficking Pro Bono Project takes cases upon referral from identified community partners to address the expunction of criminal records, restitution, protective orders, the advocacy of victim-witnesses and other civil matters. MVA has also partnered with the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of North Carolina to assist with victim support.

"We connected with local and national leaders involved in the fight against sex trafficking to identify victims' most pressing legal needs. However, through the high demand for a variety of legal services in just the last six months, we quickly learned that our role as lawyers for trafficking survivors will evolve as their legal needs present themselves to us," Byrne stated.

In her presentation, Vandenberg, who has spent nearly two decades fighting trafficking, forced labor, rape as a war crime, and violence against women, addressed legal remedies for sex trafficking and forced labor victims as provided by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The law, passed by Congress in 2000 and subsequently amended in 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2013, requires mandatory restitution for trafficking survivors. Vandenberg noted that "... [for victims] to know that they are entitled to seek restitution can be simply life changing, and it is so important we have pro bono attorneys available to help them secure what

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they are rightly entitled to receive.”

Another goal of the Firm’s Human Trafficking Pro Bono Project is to raise awareness among the bar and service providers. That was achieved with the training, which drew more than 75 attendees. The audience included representatives from MVA and other firms, the District Attorney’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office, law enforcement, and several non-governmental organizations.

“We are hopeful that the leadership and enthusiasm in the room will lead to not only increased victim advocacy but inter-agency collaboration in the fight against trafficking,” Byrne said.

Anyone interested in learning more about MVA’s Human Trafficking Project should contact Stephanie Gryder at 704-331-2380 or stephaniegryder@mvalaw.com. To learn more about The Human Trafficking Pro Bono Legal Center, see the Center’s website at www.htprobono.org.