



**MY MOM'S STORY:  
THE BEGINNING OF MY  
FIGHT AGAINST  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

*"Her pain became my purpose."* — Penny Ronning

# The Global Scale of Financial Crime

- \$3.1 trillion in global illicit funds (2023)
- **\$346.7 billion: human trafficking**
- \$782.9 billion: drug trafficking
- \$11.5 billion: terrorism

*“Human trafficking is not just a crime—it’s an industry.”*

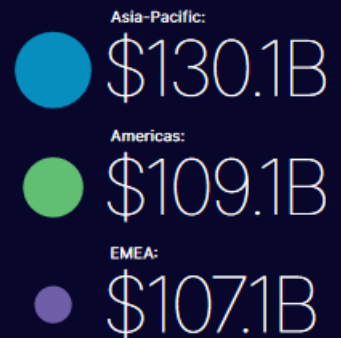
Source: Nasdaq Verafin 2024

## A Humanitarian Crisis

At any time, **tens of millions of people are coerced into labor or sex work.**<sup>13</sup>

In 2023, an estimated  
**\$346.7B**  
of illicit funds was linked to  
Human Trafficking.

### Human Trafficking by Region



of Survey Respondents ranked  
**Human Trafficking as a Top Concern**,  
and in deep dive interviews it was  
elevated as a top concern.

# Human Trafficking Myths

- Human trafficking is motivated by bias & hate
- Foreigners must be involved
- Human trafficking is about movement and borders
- All human trafficking is sex trafficking
- All victims are minors
- Victims self-identify
- There must be chains, beatings, or physical restraint

*“Believing the myths lets traffickers hide in plain sight.”*

# Defining Human Trafficking

The White Slave Traffic Act of **1910**  
Mann Act Amended **1986** to further  
protect minors and adult males.

The Trafficking Victims Protection  
Act (TVPA) of **2000** provides a three-  
pronged approach that includes  
prevention, protection, and  
prosecution.

**U.S. federal law** defines human trafficking as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person into commercial sex acts or labor against their will.

## THE A-M-P MODEL

Action	Means*	Purpose
Induce Recruits Harbors Transports Provides or Obtains	Force Fraud or Coercion	Commercial Sex ( <i>Sex Trafficking</i> ) or Labor/Services ( <i>Labor Trafficking</i> )

\*Minors induced into commercial sex are human trafficking victims—  
regardless if force, fraud, or coercion is present.

# DEFINING A COMMERCIAL SEX ACT

A commercial sex act is the giving or receiving of **anything of value** (money, drugs, shelter, food, clothes, rent payment, etc.) to a person in exchange for a sex act.

In Billings, MT, a 14-year-old girl can sell for \$900 an hour.

*“What has value to a vulnerable child? Safety. Shelter. Love.”*

*Source: FBI*

# How Traffickers Maintain Control

- **Force:** violence, confinement, starvation, rape
- **Fraud:** false job, love, or marriage promises
- **Coercion:** threats, debt, blackmail, deportation, **FEAR**

*"Fear is the currency of trafficking. If they control your fear, they control your freedom."*

# 2023 Montana Flips the Script on Buyers

## HB112

- **Sellers:** Misdemeanor, max 6 months jail
- **Buyers:** Now face **felony** charges
- 1st offense: up to 5 years
- 2nd: up to 10 years

*“After **YEARS** of fighting for this, in 2023, we **FINALLY** started holding the buyer accountable.”*



# Sex Trafficking. Labor Trafficking.

*“It’s not just locked rooms—it’s your neighborhood.”*

## Polaris Study: 25 Distinct Business Models

### Sex trafficking

- Commercial Sex
- Pornography/CSAM
- Phone sex lines
- Stripping, live sex shows
- Mail-order brides
- Truck stops
- All ages
- 90%+ are female victims
- Up to 50% are minors

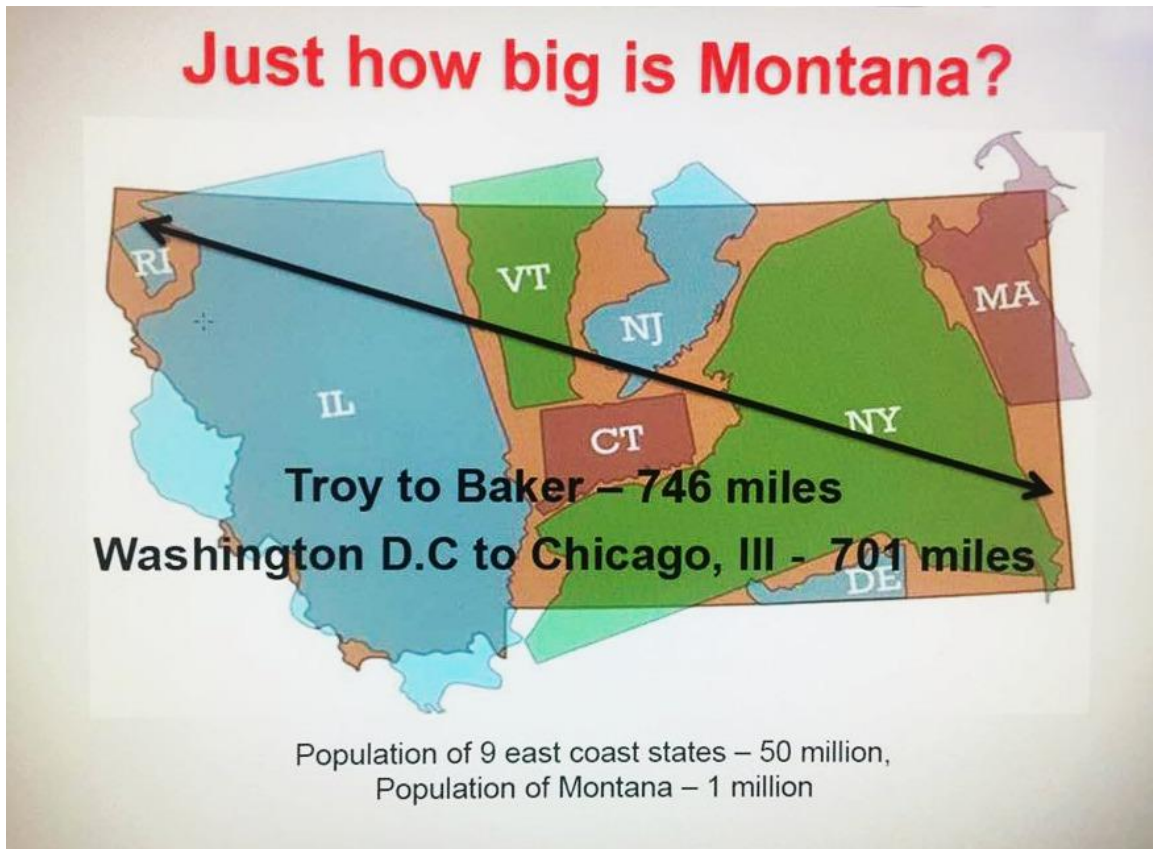
Can be hidden & locked away or **hidden in plain sight**

### Labor trafficking

- Domestic servitude (housework/childcare)
- Service industry (restaurants, hotels)
- Hair, nail salons
- Construction
- Small businesses, factories & “sweatshops”
- Agriculture, ranch
- Landscape workers
- Janitorial
- Door-to-door sales
- Panhandling



# Why Montana?



- Rural isolation & long highways
- High rates of poverty and addiction
- Native, foster, LGBTQ2S+ youth at greater risk
- Shortage of shelters & trauma-informed care

*“Trafficking thrives where support systems fail.”*

# Where It Starts

- Schools, malls, shelters, bus stops
- Online games, dating apps, social media
- Fake job or modeling offers
- **#1 method: Sold by someone they trust**

*“The trafficker isn’t always a stranger. Sometimes, it’s someone you love.”*



# Grooming: How They Gain Control

**Grooming is not random — it's targeted, calculated, and intentional.**

Traffickers learn what the child needs--and then becomes it:

- Offer shelter, love, status, or protection
- Mirror the child's hopes, dreams, and fears
- Build trust—then manipulate it

*“Grooming doesn't start with force—it starts with friendship.”*



# Recruitment into Trafficking

- FBI term: **psychological kidnapping**
- **Romeo** pimp – seduce and control with psychological manipulation
- **Seasoning** to ensure compliance – beating, rape, sleep/food deprivation, isolation from family, psychological manipulation, threaten family/friends, eye balling
- **Daddy** – name pimp often requires victim to call them

*“They steal their minds before they sell their bodies.”*



# Warning Signs (Medical & Behavioral)

- Delayed medical care
- Inconsistent stories, coached answers
- Age confusion (appears younger or older)
- Inappropriate sexual knowledge or dress

*“The body may whisper what the child can’t say.”*

*Source: FBI*

# Warning Signs (Social & Control)

- Fearful, submissive, avoids eye contact
- Doesn't speak—someone else answers
- Few personal items, no ID, may be branded

*“Watch for who's silent—and who speaks for them.”*

*Source: FBI*

# What Buyers Say Behind Closed Doors

Rights4Girls studied 89 conversations divided by region amongst buyers on “Hobby boards.” The report revealed:

- Showed indifference to violence and drug dependency
- Expressed racism and misogyny
- Admitted knowing the people they bought were vulnerable

*“These are not men unaware. These are men who **know**—and buy anyway.”*

Source: Rights4Girls, [\*Buyers Unmasked \(2025\)\*](#)



**No Buyers  
No Business  
No Victims**

Human trafficking doesn't begin with a trafficker.  
It begins with a **buyer**.

**The real root of trafficking?**

**Demand** for sex and cheap labor--not race, immigration, or runaway youth.

*"We cannot stop supply without confronting demand."*

# Backpage: Profiting from Abuse

- Revenue jumped from \$5.3M (2008) to \$135M (2014)
- Over 90% of revenue came from adult ads
- Ads often featured victims of trafficking—many underage



*“It wasn’t a website. It was a marketplace for rape.”*

*Source: California DOJ*

# Montana Statistics Gathered by FBI

## October 2016 – October 2017

### Ad Numbers for 6 Top Websites

• Billings	19,226
• Bozeman	5,133
• Missoula	4,615
• Great Falls	2,931
• Butte	2,548
• Helena	2,274
• Kalispell	2,223

## September 2020 – September 2021

### Ad Numbers for 6 Top Websites

• Billings	11,853
• Bozeman	7,663
• Missoula	7,642
• Helena	7,052
• Great Falls	6,400
• Butte	4,165
• Kalispell	3,804

## May 2021 – May 2022

### Ad Numbers for 6 Top Websites

• Billings	5,703
• Bozeman	4,116
• Missoula	3,629
• Great Falls	2,726
• Helena	2,465
• Kalispell	1,882
• Butte	1,820



# Illicit Massage Businesses

## Victims

- Live on-site, 24 hours a day
- Victims typically 30 – 75 years old
- \$60 house fee
- Sex and labor trafficking
- VW have state license
- One female victim = \$3,800 - \$18,000 a month for IMB in Billings, MT
- Victims may be mail-order brides; domestic violence victims; smuggled into the country; debt-bondage victims

## IMBs

- Located in strip malls; converted houses; office buildings
- Security cameras
- Locked doors; buzzer system
- Windows covered or darkened
- Sexually suggestive advertising
- Neon OPEN sign; ATM machine
- Open 10 AM – 2 AM or 24 hours



*“These women don’t clock out—they’re trapped. Behind neon signs and wellness words are lives held hostage.”*

*Source: FBI, MT DOJ, USAO*



# Facebook Ad for Health Massage



♥ Don't keep your body in pain!  
relieve build up stress! ♥

Dec 30, 2020 – Feb 28, 2021

★ 🌸 🌸 ♥ Health Massage ♥ 🌸 🌸 ★



Posted on Dec 30, 2020

★ 🌸 🌸 ♥ Health Massage ♥ 🌸 🌸 ★

( Licensed massage Therapist )

🎉 🎉 GRAND OPENING! 🎉 🎉



♥ Have muscle pain? Asian Massage  
may be right for you! ♥

Dec 30, 2020 – Feb 28, 2021

★ 🌸 🌸 ♥ Health Massage ♥ 🌸 🌸 ★

# Common Emojis in Trafficking

Source: Collective Liberty

## COMMON EMOJIS IN TRAFFICKING



Money, Bag, or Trap



Money, Dollars, or Cost of Service



Money, symbol often used by pimps



Pimp, can be accompanied by initials



Victim is a minor



Victim is young or near 18th birthday



Underage



Victim is a minor and/or a virgin



Victim is white female



The victim may be new to the area or in a town for a limited time. Can also mean the buyer must travel for services.



Vagina



Penis



Buttocks



Male ejaculation



Seeing something X-rated



Condom



Wifey or sister prostitute



Prostitute



Red light special or prostitution



Kissing or oral sex



69 sex act





BREAKING NEWS

POLICE YET TO



DETERMINE WHETHER RAMPAGE A HATE CRIME

NIGHTLY  
NEWS



# A Spa—or a Crime Scene?

In 2021, a shooter targeted multiple massage spas in Atlanta. The tragedy revealed:

- The normalization of illicit massage businesses
- The racialized, gendered dehumanization of Asian women
- The connection between sexual exploitation and violence

*“These weren’t just shootings. They were the result of a culture that profits from exploitation.”*

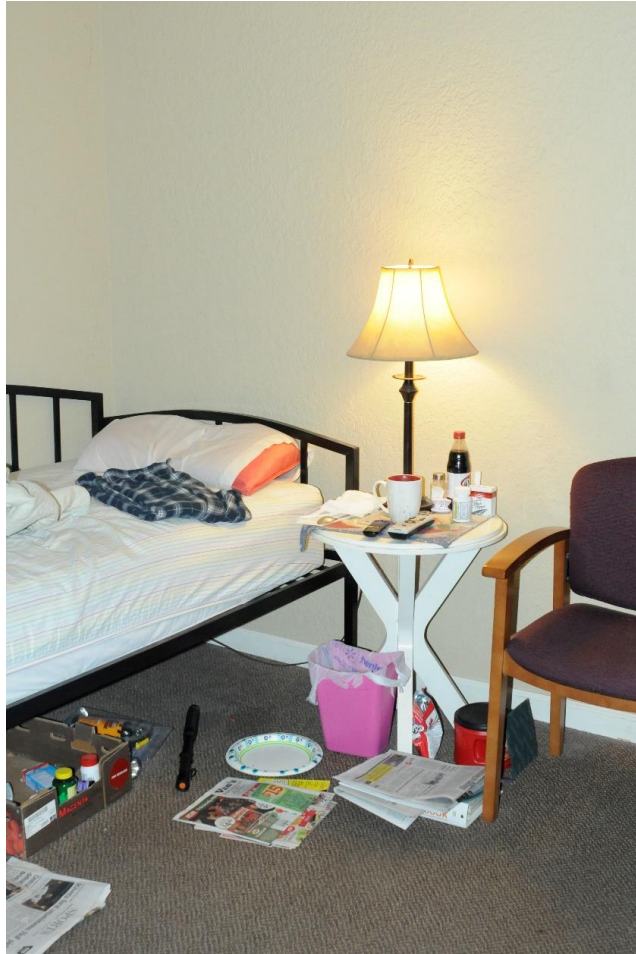
# A Spa

IMBs often hide in plain sight—offering facades of legitimacy while trapping victims behind closed doors.



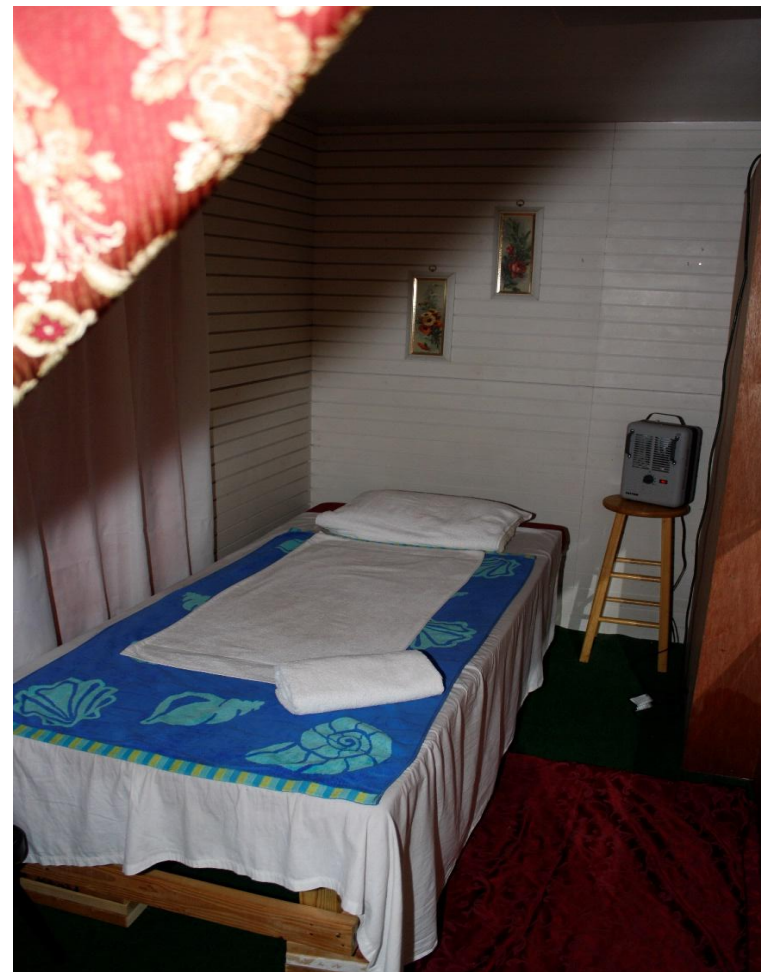


# A Spa





# King Spa



# PORNHUB



## 6 CORE AREAS OF CRIMINAL CONTENT ON PORNHUB include:

1. Sex Trafficking
2. Child Sexual Abuse Material and Child Sex Trafficking
3. Rape
4. Incapacitated Sexual Assault where the Victim is Drugged or Drunk
5. Image-Based Sexual Abuse
6. Hidden Camera/Spycam

*“This isn’t just porn. It’s evidence of crimes—monetized, normalized, and streamed worldwide. If we wouldn’t allow it in real life, why is it hosted online for profit?”*

*Source: Traffickinghub Movement*

# Pornography by the Numbers

- **40 MILLION** Americans are regular visitors to porn sites
- **25%** of all online searches are porn-related
- **35%** of internet downloads are pornographic
- **9 – 11 YEARS:** Average age of first Internet porn exposure

*“We are not protecting our children—we are handing them a screen.”*

*Source: Culture Reframed*

# What are Kids Seeing?

## Top Acts in Popular Porn:

- Gagging (the #1 act)
- Strangulation
- Rough anal sex
- Ejaculation/spitting on face
- Hair pulling
- Spanking

*“What’s normalized in porn is often criminal in real life.”*

*Source: Culture Reframed*



# This is Not Fantasy— This is Grooming

## Selected Category Counts on Pornhub:

- 305,000+ Amateur
- 263,000+ Teen
- 97,000+ Solo Female
- 84,000+ Step
- 55,000+ Daddy
- 15,000+ Babysitter
- 9,000+ Teacher
- 5,000+ Stepdad

*“When abuse is disguised as entertainment, we train an audience to accept it.”*

*Source: Culture Reframed*

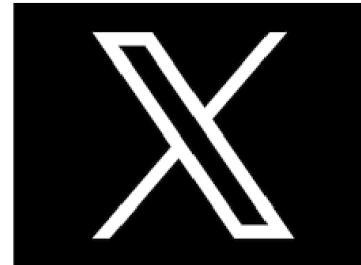
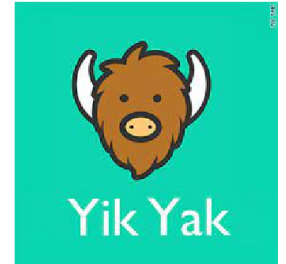
# The 12 Most Dangerous Apps for Kids



Snapchat



Instagram



Source: [The Bark Blog](#)

# The Cost of Early Exposure

- 1 in 3 kids see hardcore porn by age 12
- Platforms: **Roblox, Fortnite, TikTok**
- Children aged 6–12 see more **non-photographic sexual content** than adults
- Kids exposed are **3.3x more likely** to engage in sexual harassment or violence
- Rising **child-on-child abuse**, often recorded and shared

*“When children learn about sex through violence, they repeat what they see.”*

*Source: Culture Reframed*

# What Porn Teaches Boys

- Frequent porn use is linked to:
- Buying sex
- Believing abuse is normal
- Expecting domination
- Porn frames **violence as desire** and **abuse as pleasure**

*“The message isn’t just sexist—it’s dangerous.”*

*Source: Culture Reframed*

# What Are Girls Learning?

Online content teaches young girls:

- Your value is in how you look
- Being hurt means being wanted
- Violence is love

*“We’re raising girls to be victims—that is not empowerment.”*

*Source: Culture Reframed*



# How Local Policy Disrupts Trafficking

## City of Billings Ordinance (2021)

- Created local licensing & oversight for spas and massage businesses
- Targeted the IMB model by requiring transparency and inspections
- Empowered city code enforcement as a frontline prevention tool

*“One ordinance can close the door on exploitation in your own neighborhood.”*



# 2019 MT State Legislature

## SB 147

- Criminalized all sexual acts for pay—not just intercourse
- Added enhanced penalties for trafficking and knowingly purchasing from victims
- Classified sex trafficking as a **Crime of Violence**

*“No more excuses. No more leniency.”*



**YHTTF**  
*Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force*



# 2019 MT State Legislature

## HB 749

- Allowed city & board officials to verify massage licenses
- Funded **Montana DOJ's first dedicated anti-trafficking staff**

Before HB 749, Montana had **zero** full-time state investigators focused on trafficking.

*“This law turned policy into protection.”*



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# Federal Legislative Priorities

## *Online Safety & Accountability*

- **SHIELD Act** – Non-consensual image removal
- **DEFIANCE Act** – AI-generated exploitation remedy
- **TAKE IT DOWN Act** – Removal of explicit content within 48 hours

## *Victim-Centered Support*

- **Trafficking Survivors Relief Act** – Criminal record relief

*“When Congress acts together, children are safer. We are all safer.”*

## *Civil & Legal Remedies*

- **EARN IT Act** – Allows victims to sue platforms that host child abuse material
- **STOP CSAM Act** – Expands civil remedies and requires removal of exploitative images

## *Child Safety & Enforcement*

- **Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)** – Creates a duty of care for platforms to protect children
- **Project Safe Childhood Act** – Enhances DOJ efforts against online child exploitation
- **REPORT Act** – Expands CyberTipline and improves evidence retention

# What to do if You Suspect Human Trafficking

## Emergency Protocol:

- If someone is in **immediate danger**: CALL 911

## Report Suspected Trafficking:

- **In Montana:**
  - FBI: (406) 254-8108
  - MT DOJ: (406) 413-0035
- **Nationally:**
  - Homeland Security Tip Line: 1-866-347-2423

*“Never approach a suspected trafficker. Call law enforcement.”*

# Talk Trafficking Podcast

A national podcast that brings together survivors, advocates, and experts to expose exploitation and ignite change.

Available at: <https://yhttf.org/>

*“Because silence is the trafficker’s greatest ally.”*





# Task Force Leaders

## STRUCTURE, LEADERSHIP, AND MEMBERSHIP

The Task Force's volunteer co-chairs founded the Task Force, along with the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office. The Task Force's *Steering Committee (SC)* comprises co-chairs, coordinators, committee chairs, and other leaders.

<b>Co-Chairs and Co-Founders:</b>	Penny Ronning	Stephanie Baucus
<b>Board of Directors:</b>	Penny Ronning Scott Koch Erin Walker	Stephanie Baucus Melanie Tripp
<b>Administrative Coordinator:</b>	Pam Rogina	
<b>Data Analytics Coordinator:</b>	Nicolette Rose, FBI	

The work of the Task Force is divided into three primary committees:

### 1. Prosecution and Law Enforcement

- Co-Chairs: Brandon Walter, FBI Zeno Baucus, USAO

### 2. Protection and Victim Services

- Co-Chairs: Erin Harris, BIA, MMIP Rhonda Busenitz, USAO
- Vice Chairs: Michele Stewart, FBI Erin Lambert, YWCA
- Secretary: Georgia Cady, Tumbleweed

### 3. Prevention and Community Awareness

- Chair: Melanie Tripp, Zonta
- Vice Chair: Scott Koch, Whitewood Transport, Truckers Against Trafficking

The Task Force includes over *900 representatives from over 100 organizations*, including the USAO, FBI, MTDOJ, local law enforcement, prosecutors, government, schools, hospitals, nonprofits, churches, businesses, and the community.

*“Collaboration across agencies, disciplines, and communities is our strength.”*

# Take Action Today

## **Donate**

- YHTTF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit
- Online at: [yhttf.org](http://yhttf.org)
- Mail: 27 N 27th St, Ste 1900, Billings, MT 59101

## **Book a Training**

- Email: [stoptraffickingmontana@gmail.com](mailto:stoptraffickingmontana@gmail.com)
- Request presentations for schools, workplaces, agencies

## **Contact Officials**

- Urge support for bipartisan federal and state legislation

*“Every voice matters. Every action counts.”*

# Resources

- Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force
- Shared Hope International
- National Center on Sexual Exploitation
- Digital Childhood Alliance
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security – Blue Campaign
- Polaris
- Culture Reframed
- Protect Young Eyes
- Bark
- Paving the Way Foundation
- TAT (Truckers Against Trafficking)
- Uprising

*“Education is prevention. Prevention is power.”*

# Contact Us

- Follow us on *Facebook* at Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force
- Website: [yhddf.org](http://yhddf.org)

## Co-Founders and Co-Chairs

- *Penny Ronning and Stephanie Baucus*

## Board Members

- *Penny Ronning*
- *Stephanie Baucus*
- *Scott Koch*
- *Melanie Tripp*
- *Erin Walker*

## Yellowstone Human Trafficking Task Force

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- [pennyronning@gmail.com](mailto:pennyronning@gmail.com)

*“Together, we shine a light on the darkest corners.”*



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# YHTTF

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