

MIAMI BEACH

COMMITTEE MEMORANDUM

TO: Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee Members

FROM: Eric Carpenter, City Manager

DATE: November 6, 2024

TITLE: DISCUSS EXPANDING THE CAPABILITIES OF PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION TO SUPPORT CALLS REGARDING SUSPECTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE CITY OF MIAMI BEACH.

RECOMMENDATION

To better support calls for service related to human trafficking, the Administration recommends the establishment of a hotline number to expedite the relay of pertinent information to professionals dedicated to combating human trafficking, the tailored training of personnel within the Public Safety Communications Division, the establishment of a City webpage and a dedicated marketing campaign to publicize the initiative.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

At the June 26, 2024 City Commission Meeting, at the request of Commissioner Alex Fernandez, the Mayor and City Commission approved a referral (C4 AN) to the Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee ("PSNQLC") to discuss solutions the City of Miami Beach can implement to improve the existing mechanism for reporting possible cases of human trafficking occurring within the city.

ANALYSIS

Since 2018, the Miami Beach Police Department (MBPD) has staffed a squad specifically tasked with human trafficking investigations. This unit is embedded within the Street Crimes Section of the Department's Criminal Investigations Division. The Human Trafficking Unit (HTU) proactively seeks victims of human trafficking activities to rescue them from the nefarious situations in which they find themselves. Once a victim is identified, HTU will provide basic assistance and follow-up services to help them take control of their lives. Simultaneously, HTU aggressively seeks, arrests, and helps prosecute the very perpetrators who prey upon and profit from these victims.

In addition to its proactive work, HTU also acts upon tips from various agencies that employ a hotline number for victims and potential informants to call. Once the hotline receives a call, it is routed through a chain of agencies such as the Miami-Dade Police Department and/or State Attorney's Office Human Trafficking Task Force. The information received from the tip eventually arrives at the HTU with a time delay of 48 hours or more which often results in the victim no longer being in the city and beyond the ability of the HTU to help.

A possible remedy for this delay would be the establishment of a hotline number for victims and informants/tipsters in Miami Beach to call. The existence of a local hotline number could greatly expedite the relaying of information directly to HTU and allow for a timelier response. The administration has provisionally reserved a vanity phone number as a hotline number. Efforts are underway to implement a technical solution for members of the Public Safety Communications Division (PSCD) to be made aware calls made to the dedicated number are being received through the Hotline.

PSCD complaint operators are best suited to receive these calls should the details relayed by the caller require an immediate public safety response in case of imminent danger or injuries being reported. Absent a requirement for a priority response by police or fire rescue personnel, PSCD employees will receive training on human trafficking awareness. Specifically, operators will learn to recognize indicators of possible human trafficking in phone conversations with callers and the questions to ask to acquire further information for follow-up by HTU.

The training for PSCD will be provided by the members of HTU. HTU will also continue to provide additional training to Patrol Division officers, who will be the initial responders to calls for service in potential human trafficking situations. The Police Department will also establish a process in coordination with Polaris, the national clearinghouse for human trafficking, to report and quantify all calls that are reported to the locally established number. This coordination will ensure efforts are not detracting from the compiling of statistics Polaris seeks to quantify as part of its mission. The Police Department will coordinate with other City departments, Information Technology, Marketing and Communication, as well as Polaris to conduct a marketing campaign to launch the hotline number and establish a webpage on the City's website dedicated to human trafficking awareness and resources to help combat this global epidemic.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The financial impact should be minimal as it makes use of existing resources within PSCD and the Police Department. A nominal amount yet to be determined may be needed for the marketing campaign to launch the hotline.

CONCLUSION

The Administration recommends a multidepartment initiative to establish a local human trafficking hotline alongside a dedicated webpage advertised via a citywide marketing strategy be considered to better support the City's efforts to combat human trafficking.

Applicable Area

Citywide

Is this a "Residents Right to Know" item, pursuant to City Code Section 2-17?

No

Is this item related to a G.O. Bond Project?

No

Was this Agenda Item initially requested by a lobbyist which, as defined in Code Sec. 2-481, includes a principal engaged in lobbying? No

If so, specify the name of lobbyist(s) and principal(s):

Department

Police/Fire/IT

Sponsor(s)

Commissioner Alex Fernandez

Co-sponsor(s)

Commissioner Laura Dominguez

Condensed Title

Public Safety Communications Division Support for Human Trafficking Calls