The California Hotel and Lodging Industry Legislative Action Summit is the steam engine propelling the hotel industry into change.

On March 15th, over 150 hoteliers across the nation gathered in the historic Sutter Club located in Sacramento, California to discuss recent developments in the hospitality industry and promote legislative reform. With over 1 million California jobs supported by the hotel industry and $66.3 billion spent in California hotels alone, the state’s hospitality industry represents a significant segment of its economy.
Legal developments surrounding human trafficking were at the core of the summit’s focus with proposed bills including Senate Bill 270 which requires hotels to train employees to recognize signs of human trafficking and report them to a law enforcement agency and Assembly Bill 260 which requires hotels post a notice relating to slavery and human trafficking along with a help line. The California Hotel and Lodging Association (CH&LA) commented that “educating and training employees to recognize and report suspected instances of trafficking is very important to stopping this illicit crime” in support of SB 270 while voicing concerns about AB 260, which would deter travelers in a manner reminiscent of the consequences of Prop 65.

The proposed sign to be placed at hotel fronts under AB 260, opposed by the CH&LA.

“If you or someone you know is being forced to engage in any activity and cannot leave—whether it is commercial sex, housework, farm work, construction, factory, retail, or restaurant work, or any other activity—call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7988 or the California Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking at 1-888-KEY-2-FREEDOM or call 1-888-539-2373 to access help and services. Victims of slavery and human trafficking are protected under United States and California law. The hotlines are:

- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Toll Free
- Operated by nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations
- Anonymous and confidential
- Accessible in more than 180 languages
- Able to provide help, referral to services, training, and general information”

“Of the two options presented, educating our employees about trafficking is the far better approach. Our employees are the ones who are there 24/7 and would be far more effective than having a poster at the front door, which would only cause confusion for our guests,” commented John Wang, Region 12 Vice Director. “It would only tarnish the experience and perception of safety of our property.”

Other Region 12 team members were eager for the opportunities the summit presented in human rights advocacy. “Awareness and education of hotel staff alone is a necessary step in the right direction to alleviate a much larger problem in human trafficking” said Board Director Annie Chang. “Deterring recidivism of trafficked victims and ensuring long term sustainability through social services provided during prosecution of traffickers will hopefully be the next step we can take to eradicate modern day slavery.”

Similar goals of awareness were voiced by other attendees. Chip Rogers, the CEO and President of the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), said “It’s important having these summits
so that lawmakers have an increased appreciation and understanding of the needs of hoteliers. They’re reliant on us and lobbying truly gives our hotel owners a voice.”

“I think it’s important that we represent our hotels and make sure our congressmen know what’s going on,” explained Susanne DeBoever, CHOC Administrator. “Talking to members of congress is a great way to raise awareness about the importance of these bills.”

Jyoti Sarolia, Director of CHOC Region 12 commented that she ultimately wanted to “speak to members of the House and paint the story of what these regulations mean to me as a businesswoman in California.”

Other priority legislation on the agenda included Senate Bill 384 which would allow the sale of alcohol between the hours of 2 a.m. and 4 a.m., Assembly Bill 1008 which would make employers asking for the disclosure of an applicant’s criminal history unlawful, and Assembly Bill 5 which would require an employer with 10 or more employees to offer additional hours of work to an existing nonexempt employee before hiring an additional employee or subcontractor.

“There’s definitely a need for labor reform,” said Kirk Lok, a Region 12 Board Member who voiced additional legislative concerns. “We need to review state minimum wage to reflect differences in market area cost of living and reform Workers Comp insurance abuses.”

Whether it’s ADA laws, regulation of the AirBnb business model, or the prevalence of human trafficking, as hotel owners we see the need for change through legislation. So, what are you waiting for? It’s time for you to take initiative and get registered for next year’s summit.

We’ll see you there.