



2025 HUMAN TRAFFICKING SUMMIT

Tuesday, September 30, 2025

A virtual event at HumanTraffickingSummit.com





2025 VIRTUAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING SUMMIT



ATTORNEY GENERAL JAMES UTHMEIER

Attorney General James Uthmeier grew up in Destin, Florida. He graduated from the University of Florida, where he ran varsity track and cross-country for the National Champion Gators. He is also a graduate of Georgetown Law. James was appointed as the Attorney General by Governor Ron DeSantis in February 2025.

Before his appointment, Attorney General Uthmeier served as the Chief of Staff for Governor DeSantis, where he led the executive staff and oversaw 20 state agencies and over 100,000 employees. Attorney General Uthmeier also served as the Governor's General Counsel and managed the litigation and legal work of the Governor and state executive agencies. Previously, Attorney General Uthmeier served as a senior advisor and counsel to U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. He began his career as a litigation associate at Jones Day's Washington, D.C. office.

James is an adjunct professor at Florida State University College of Law. James and his wife Jean co-teach religious education classes at the St. Thomas More Co-Cathedral in Tallahassee. They are the proud parents of three children.

Keynote



COLONEL GARY HOWZE, FLORIDA HIGHWAY PATROL

Colonel Gary Howze is a graduate of Florida State University and was a member of the 84th Florida Highway Patrol (FHP/Patrol) Academy Class in January 1990. He has served as a State Trooper in multiple positions of increasing responsibility throughout Florida to include Patrol Operations, Traffic Homicide, Criminal Investigations, Training Academy, Internal Affairs, Professional Compliance, Emergency Management Coordinator, Inspector General Investigations, Strategic Services, and the Patrol's Executive Officer.

In 2019, Howze transitioned from the Patrol to serve three years as the Director of Law Enforcement, Victim Services, and Criminal Justice Programs for Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody. In that role, he was the primary liaison for the Florida Attorney General for federal, state, and local law enforcement issues.

In 2023, Howze returned to the Patrol after being appointed as the Director. He is responsible for the daily operations and 2,500 members of

FHP. He currently serves as a Commissioner with the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, Chairman of the Joint Task Force on State Law Enforcement Communications, a member of the Board of Directors for Special Olympics Florida, an advisor for the Florida Sheriff's Cold Case Advisory Commission, and an agency representative on the Domestic Security Oversight Council.



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Educational Partner



PRESIDENT JEANETTE NUÑEZ, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Mrs. Jeanette M. Nuñez is the President of Florida International University. The FIU Board of Trustees voted unanimously to name Mrs. Nuñez as the university's seventh president. Her presidency was confirmed by the Florida Board of Governors on June 18, 2025.

Prior to her appointment, Mrs. Nuñez served as Florida's Lieutenant Governor. She was first elected in 2018 and subsequently re-elected in 2022. Mrs. Nuñez oversaw the Florida Department of Health and served as Chair of Space Florida, Florida's Cybersecurity Advisory Council, and the Health Care Innovation Council. She was reappointed as Chair of the Space Florida Board of Directors on February 17, 2025.

Before her tenure as Lieutenant Governor, Mrs. Nuñez served as a State Representative of the Florida House of Representatives from 2010 to 2018. She held several positions such as Speaker Pro Tempore and Vice Chair of the Appropriations Committee.

In addition to her extensive experience in public service, Mrs. Nuñez has served as an adjunct professor and guest lecturer at Florida International University. Mrs. Nuñez is a proud two-time FIU alumna. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and Political Science and her Master of Public Administration from Florida International University.



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Award Presentations



SECRETARY TAYLOR HATCH, FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Taylor N. Hatch brings a dynamic record of leadership to her role as Secretary of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), where she was appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis in 2025. Mrs. Hatch comes to DCF after most recently serving as the Director of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) from 2023 to 2025. While serving as Director of APD, Mrs. Hatch led the team to transformational service delivery by challenging rigid governmental infrastructures where they exist, to deliver for the people they are intended to serve. Practically, this translated to engaging critical stakeholders and partners to inform and develop key opportunities to remove unnecessary bureaucracy, enhance

end-user experiences, and strategically offer the right supports at the right time. Throughout every leadership post, Mrs. Hatch challenges the status quo, driving the performance of government to be more efficient, accessible, appropriate, and impactful for those it serves.



ACTING SECRETARY TIMOTHY NIERMANN, FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

Timothy "Tim" Niermann served as Acting Secretary for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) from June 2025 to August 2025. He has served as Deputy Secretary for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice since December 2015, having also served as Interim Secretary in 2018. Prior to that, Mr. Niermann served as the Assistant Secretary for Probation & Intervention Services. Mr. Niermann also served for four years as the DJJ Central Regional Director for Probation & Community Intervention, where he was responsible for the oversight of services in six circuits. He also served as the DJJ Chief Probation Officer (CPO) for Circuit 6, serving Pasco and Pinellas counties. Mr. Niermann is a 40-year veteran of Florida

state government, and his expertise covers operational oversight of juvenile justice programming. He is a graduate of the University of South Florida in the field of criminal justice.



RITA PETERS, J.D., ASSISTANT STATEWIDE PROSECUTOR, SPECIAL COUNSEL, FLORIDA OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, OFFICE OF STATEWIDE PROSECUTION

Rita Peters is a veteran prosecutor with 26 years of experience, including 24 years focused exclusively on sex crimes, human trafficking, and child exploitation. She currently serves in the Office of the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution and is Special Counsel to Attorney General James Uthmeier on matters involving human trafficking and child victimization. Prior to this role, she served nearly 18 years at the Office of the State Attorney in Hillsborough County, including 15 years in the Sex Offender Division with 12 years as Chief. A graduate of the University of Tampa and Loyola Law School, she is a respected authority

in the prosecution of crimes against vulnerable victims. Her work has been recognized most recently with the 2024 Homeland Security Investigations State Prosecutor of the Year award and the 2023 Statewide Council on Human Trafficking Prosecutor of the Year award. She teaches for the Florida Prosecuting Attorneys Association on domestic violence, sex crimes, human trafficking, and child victimization. Mrs. Peters regularly speaks to diverse audiences and trains agency partners in the fight against human trafficking.



2025 VIRTUAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING SUMMIT

Sessions

HOW CYBER AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES ARE TRANSFORMING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Presented by Inga Trauthig, Ph.D., Research Professor, Florida International University, and Myah Havertong, M.S., Graduate Research Assistant, Florida International University

The rapid pace of technological innovation is a continuous challenge for law enforcement and public institutions. Just like other malevolent non-state actors, human traffickers continuously assess and exploit emerging technologies to advance their operations. This presentation examines the technologies traffickers have leveraged in recent years and provides a forward-looking assessment of key trends. Topics include the role of artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, drones, social media platforms, and encrypted messaging applications in shaping the future landscape of human trafficking.

UNMASKING TRAFFICKERS: EXPOSING THEIR TACTICS, DISRUPTING THEIR STRATEGIES, EMPOWERING OUR SOLUTIONS

Presented by Marina Anderson, Statewide Human Trafficking Training Specialist, Florida Department of Children and Families, and Ryan Ellis, Detective, Clay County Sheriff's Office, Senior Investigator, INTERCEPT Task Force, Task Force Officer, Homeland Security Investigations

Human traffickers use calculated manipulation, psychological control, and coercion to exploit their victims. To effectively combat trafficking, we must first understand the traffickers' mindsets, methods, and strategies. This workshop takes a deep dive into the deceptive tactics used to groom, recruit, and control victims. Participants will learn how traffickers identify vulnerabilities, exploit trust, and maintain power over their victims. Through real-world case studies and expert analysis, attendees will gain the critical knowledge needed to recognize warning signs, intervene effectively, and implement survivor-centered solutions. This course is designed for child welfare professionals, law enforcement, educators, social workers, and community advocates dedicated to dismantling human trafficking networks and protecting vulnerable individuals.

At the end of this workshop, participants will be able to identify key trafficker tactics and psychological control methods, analyze case scenarios to understand recruitment and grooming strategies, apply effective intervention techniques to disrupt trafficking operations, and strengthen prevention efforts through education and advocacy.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FRONT LINE OF VICTIM SERVICES

Presented by Samantha Kolb, Clinical Director, Selah Freedom, and Misty Halsey, Law Enforcement Liaison and Trainer, Selah Freedom

Service providers are often faced with high-stakes situations while supporting human trafficking survivors. Using lessons learned over the years, the presenters share their expert insight on how to make thoughtful, responsible decisions when faced with complex scenarios. The presentation walks attendees through real-life situations, the dilemmas they present, and the effective solutions to mitigate the challenges. Training objectives include improving decision-making, recognizing issues that are not readily apparent, reducing harm or re-traumatization to the survivor, and maintaining industry and professional standards.



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LEVERAGING DATA-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Presented by Joan Reid, Ph.D., LMHC, CRC, Professor of Criminology, Director of the USF Trafficking in Persons Risk to Resilience Research Lab, University of South Florida, and Shelly Wagers, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Criminology, Associate Director of the USF Trafficking in Persons Risk to Resilience Research Lab, University of South Florida

For over two decades, it has been acknowledged that Florida's risk for human trafficking is elevated due to the convergence of compounding community risk factors including the many airports and ports, major highways transversing the state, and rapidly growing economy. In addition, Florida is home to large industries particularly vulnerable to human trafficking such as agriculture, tourism, hospitality, construction, and entertainment. In response to this grave and growing risk, Florida has made concerted efforts to disrupt human trafficking and is a recognized national leader in combatting human trafficking. However, the state has been lacking crucial data to more effectively combat this pervasive and destructive issue. Accurate, comprehensive data on the prevalence, geographic distribution, trends, and community risk and resilience factors related to human trafficking are essential for developing targeted prevention efforts, identifying and assisting victims, and prosecuting perpetrators. This first annual state report on human trafficking brings together Florida's distinct and siloed sources of human trafficking data to present a comprehensive view of human trafficking risks, resiliency, and responses. Armed with this information, the state can pursue key anti-human trafficking objectives more efficiently and with transparency.

THE "MOLLY" KING OF FORT PIERCE: A CASE STUDY IN NARCOTICS-BASED COERCION IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Presented by Josh Dockus, J.D., Senior Assistant Statewide Prosecutor, Florida Office of the Attorney General, Office of Statewide Prosecution

This presentation is a case study of the self-proclaimed "molly" king of Fort Pierce, Florida. It explores how the trafficker used his access to narcotics to recruit vulnerable adult victims, exploit them, and fund his lavish lifestyle. Attendees will learn how the Office of Statewide Prosecution constructed the case using evidence-based principles and a victim-centered approach to bring the "molly" king to justice.

TRUTH OVER HYPE: ETHICAL AND IMPACTFUL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS

Presented by Laura Cusack, Consultant, Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force; Savannah Parvu, Survivor Leader; and Sarah Marie Henry, Executive Director, Catch the Wave of Hope

This presentation explores how to design educational content on human trafficking that is accurate, survivor-centered, and free of sensationalism. Participants will learn how to present complex realities without relying on fear-based false narratives or graphic imagery, which can distort understanding and perpetuate stereotypes. By focusing on truth, dignity, and ethical responsibility, this session underscores why the way we communicate about trafficking matters. Sensationalism can re-traumatize survivors, misinform audiences, and hinder effective prevention and response. Through practical strategies and real-world examples, attendees will be equipped to create presentations that foster understanding, elevate survivor voices, and drive meaningful, informed action.



2025 VIRTUAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING SUMMIT

Speakers



MARINA ANDERSON, STATEWIDE HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRAINING SPECIALIST, FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Marina has had an extensive and impactful career in the Department of Children and Families in Florida. She began her journey in 2002 and spent 14 years as a Child Protective Investigator and Field Support Supervisor in Duval County, specializing in child sexual abuse and human trafficking. In 2015, she transitioned to the Office of Community Services, where she focused on combating human trafficking at the state level. Marina's expertise and her dedication to protecting vulnerable children earned her recognition as a STAR Child Protective Investigator by Governor Rick Scott. She is a certified investigator and trainer in human trafficking, as well as a subject matter expert in critical injury, domestic violence,

physical/sexual abuse, and human trafficking. Her work not only showcases her commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of children but also highlights her leadership and expertise in addressing the complex issues of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.



LAURA CUSACK, CONSULTANT, PALM BEACH COUNTY HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE

Laura Cusack is a consultant to the Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force where she leads training, prevention education, and community collaboration efforts. She also serves as Director of Programs for the Human Trafficking Coalition of the Palm Beaches. Laura's background includes roles as a Senior Victim Advocate, Human Trafficking Prevention Educator, and Board Chair. She has trained frontline providers, facilitated groups for high-risk youth, conducted street outreach with law enforcement, and taught diversion courses for men arrested for buying sex. She launched a prevention education program serving five counties and was named the Palm Beach County Victim's Rights Coalition Victim Advocate of the Year in 2021.



JOSH DOCKUS, J.D., SENIOR ASSISTANT STATEWIDE PROSECUTOR, FLORIDA OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, OFFICE OF STATEWIDE PROSECUTION

Josh Dockus is a Senior Assistant Statewide Prosecutor in the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution and has prosecuted human trafficking crimes for the last five years. His focus has been on drug-based coercion adult human trafficking cases, and he has successfully prosecuted traffickers in counties throughout South Florida and the Treasure Coast. Prior to joining the Office of Statewide Prosecution, Josh was an Assistant State Attorney for the State's Attorney Office in Palm Beach County where he was a member of the Special Victims Unit and prosecuted sexually motivated offenses, crimes against children, and human trafficking.



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RYAN ELLIS, DETECTIVE, CLAY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE, SENIOR INVESTIGATOR, INTERCEPT TASK FORCE, TASK FORCE OFFICER, HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS

Detective Ryan Ellis is a Senior Investigator with the Clay County Sheriff's Office and a Task Force Officer with Homeland Security Investigations. Ryan has been an investigator for 18 years and spent the last 14 years conducting human exploitation investigations including hands-on offenses, an array of technology-based crimes, and human trafficking. While fighting the battle against human exploitation, Ryan has testified before legislative committees and co-authored substantial legislative changes to combat child exploitation. Ryan is a two-time recipient of the Department of Justice Investigator of the Year for victim crimes and Investigator of the Year from his agency for case work involving the rescue and identification of victims. Ryan has presented case studies at the national and state ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children) levels and trained hundreds of law enforcement officers in the fight against human exploitation. Over the course of his career, he has been the lead investigator on hundreds of major investigations.



MISTY HALSEY, LAW ENFORCEMENT LIAISON AND TRAINER, SELAH FREEDOM

Misty Halsey holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice with a concentration in human services. As Selah Freedom's Law Enforcement Liaison and Trainer, she supports survivors of human trafficking and trains law enforcement and judicial professionals nationwide. A survivor herself, Misty has over a decade of experience working with victims. Misty is a Victims' Services Practitioner and Advanced Gang Specialist, and she is a subject matter expert for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Misty received the 2017 Human Trafficking Summit Survivor Advocate of the Year award, and she partners with agencies and diversion programs across the country.



MYAH HAVERTONG, M.S., GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Myah Havertong serves as a Graduate Research Assistant for the Jack D. Gordon Institute (JGI) of Public Policy at Florida International University (FIU). She is a doctoral candidate for FIU's International Crime & Justice program, focusing her work on transnational crime organizations, their tactics of expansion, and their use of violence. Pairing her professional interests with JGI, Myah works alongside the research team to conduct open-source research and analysis on various projects involving transnational criminal organizations, the role of China in Latin American affairs, and assists with other events and projects outside of these projects. Prior to this research role, Myah was an adjunct instructor, teaching Introduction to Criminal Justice.



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SARAH MARIE HENRY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CATCH THE WAVE OF HOPE

Sarah Marie Henry is the Executive Director of Catch the Wave of Hope where she focuses on preventing the sex trafficking and exploitation of children through awareness and education, while providing restoration to survivors. She is a Certified CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children) Trainer and currently serves as the Board Chair for the Human Trafficking Coalition of the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee. She is a Child & Teen Safety Matters Certified Facilitator through the Monique Burr Foundation. Prior to Catch the Wave of Hope, she lived part time at Hope House, a Florida safe home for domestic minor girls who had been sex trafficked, and worked directly with survivors.



SAMANTHA KOLB, CLINICAL DIRECTOR, SELAH FREEDOM

Samantha Kolb is the Clinical Director of Selah Freedom, a national nonprofit that provides prevention education and restorative services for survivors of human trafficking. Samantha graduated from Florida State University earning a bachelor's degree and master's degree in social work. As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, she has 17 years of experience in the behavioral health field, specializing in trauma-informed care. Throughout her career, Samantha has provided clinical oversight across a continuum of care, and her leadership has driven the creation of innovative programs to meet emerging community needs. She is passionate about creating impactful services that support lasting healing.



SAVANNAH PARVU, SURVIVOR LEADER

Savannah has a passion for writing and speaking about the hope she has found after many years of abuse. She is involved in survivor leadership through active prevention and awareness activities. Savannah routinely shares her experiences with the public to grow knowledge of the tragic issue of familial trafficking within the commercial sex trafficking arena. A nationally recognized speaker on the subject, Savannah has won awards from anti-human trafficking organizations for her efforts. She refuses to sit back and continue to be a victim. The wounds from her past are being healed, and it is her desire to be a voice for the voiceless.



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JOAN REID, PH.D., LMHC, CRC, PROFESSOR OF CRIMINOLOGY, DIRECTOR OF THE USF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS RISK TO RESILIENCE RESEARCH LAB, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Dr. Joan Reid is a Professor of Criminology and Director of the University of South Florida (USF) Human Trafficking Risk to Resilience Research Lab. She holds a Doctorate in Criminology and a Master of Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling from USF. As a licensed mental health counselor, she has over 15 years of experience working with survivors of sexual trauma. Dr. Reid has authored four books, including *Trauma Bonding and Interpersonal Crime* (2024), and over 70 journal articles. Ranked the fifth most active human trafficking researcher globally, her work has influenced national policy and has been cited in Florida Supreme Court cases.



INGA TRAUTHIG, PH.D., RESEARCH PROFESSOR, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Inga Trauthig is a Research Professor at the Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy at Florida International University. She is a security studies scholar and received her Ph.D. from the Department of War Studies at King's College London. Dr. Trauthig has authored over 80 publications concerning hybrid warfare, security threats from non-state actors, and emerging technologies. Her work has been supported by governmental institutions in the United States and United Kingdom, international organizations, scientific bodies, and several foundations.



SHELLY WAGERS, PH.D., ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CRIMINOLOGY, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE USF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS RISK TO RESILIENCE RESEARCH LAB, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Dr. Shelly Wagers is an Associate Professor of Criminology at the University of South Florida (USF) and Associate Director of the USF Trafficking in Persons Risk to Resilience Research Lab. She also directs the Bridging Information and Resource Gaps in Human Trafficking Network (BRIGHT) Project, a digital platform connecting trafficking survivors with personalized support. With over 25 years of experience in the field of interpersonal violence, Wagers has served as an advocate, law enforcement officer, and consultant. She is known for her leadership, community engagement, and dedication to justice. She holds degrees in public health and criminology from the University of North Carolina Greensboro and USF.



ANYONE

COULD BE A VICTIM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

KNOW THE SIGNS

PHYSICAL

- Branding - scars, burns, or tattoos
- Malnourished
- Serious dental issues
- Disoriented or confused
- Infections
- Drug addiction
- Sleep deprivation

VERBAL

- Responds as if coached
- Allows someone else to speak for them
- Fearful, anxious, or paranoid
- Reluctant to discuss their injuries

Learn More: YouCanStopHT.com



OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

JAMES UTHMEIER

SAFE ★ STRONG ★ FREE



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