



What are Policy Priorities According to Survivors of Human Trafficking?

The ideas presented below are from focus groups and interviews with survivor experts

Polaris's National Survivor Study:
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What Survivor Experts Said:

Overall, it is challenging for survivors to take advantage of policies or legal aid because they are unsure what they qualify for or what remedies apply to them. Policies should be written to **account for the length of time it can take survivors to identify their experience, process, and heal.**

"No statute of limitations on victim compensation. By the time I realized that I was ready to pursue that, it was too late."

"At present, the biggest problem for me is that I am not sure whether I am a survivor of labor trafficking, and I am not sure what laws can help me, and I do not know where to find a lawyer or where to report. These are the biggest problems I am facing now. However, I have been trying to find some legal aid, but it is not very effective, and I have not found a very effective one in the past six months."

"Yes. Because the majority of us, calling ourselves survivors, or people that went through this lived experience, for most of us, it takes us a long time to -- I don't think to have the courage, because we are very courageous people. It takes a long time to just process a lot of things, a lot of trauma. And to find out, for example, if this organization and these people, this movement if they're able to help us but that trust is totally broken down."



Policies should include **remedies to address the long-lasting financial impacts** of a person's trafficking experience such as fraud, coerced debt, poor credit, and tax issues.

"It is an issue I still struggle with today. My credit is shot because I have things in my name that I never knew I had. And, because I'm not as open to telling a credit person, "Oh, this is my life, this is what I went through," and giving proof of [my trafficking experience]. I can't get a phone bill in my name. I can't get a lot of things in my name."

"Well, what comes to mind is that there are not enough resources when it comes to taxes. When I was trafficked, it was as an independent contractor. Every dollar I made for my trafficker, I was billed for, for the taxes. Imagine years after leaving the life, I have to face over half a million dollars in taxes that I have to pay, for money that I never got to keep. Then imagine now that I actually have a job where I keep my money, the IRS has the ability to garnish my wages because of the lack of payments. That happened to me and then reaching out, there's just no resources at all that I could find. I really had to scratch and claw to find anything at all."

Safe at Home laws should exist in every state to extend address confidentiality to survivors of human trafficking.

"Safe at Home. It's an address confidentiality program. They also help with name changes. Within that name change process, if your trafficker created fraud in your name or using your social security number, they can help you take care of that and even change your social security number. You do not have to have reported your trafficking to the police to be eligible for the Safe at Home program in my state. That's really critical. I wish I would've known about it sooner. It's been life-changing for my family."

"They suppress my identity from law enforcement, they suppress my address, and my birth certificate gets changed and suppressed, my driver's license got changed and suppressed. That means that if a cop looks up my name, they can't find out what my other name was. I got a name change thanks to them."



There should be avenues for survivors to legally **change their names and their social security numbers** to protect their safety after leaving their trafficking situation.

"Here's the problem. If you don't change your social security number, what good is any of that [name change] doing for you? There needs to be some kind of more help and more leniency when it comes to the social security numbers being changed because they have to be changed. They have to be. If you were in the situation I was in, or anything remotely where your number could be traced - I just think that's very important is to change that social security number along with the name."

"We've actually had young people that have faked their own death, that's how bad it was because they were being stalked and harassed. I myself am a survivor of that as well and am still going through it. I've got an open FBI case right now actually where they're investigating my perpetrator."

"You can't change your social security number, that's been the whole issue. You change your name a thousand times, but if your trafficker could have that animosity towards you, they're still going to find you. It happens all the time. Me, I pretty much live off of an alias and it's tied a little bit to the financial stability. I have to take a lot of consultant jobs and the reason for that is I don't have to pay tax. As soon as I've paid taxes and my name gets tagged and my alias is tied to an address, there's going to be a problem, or at least there have been problems."

"I so agree with the name change. I am having a hard time because I have to change my name around the people I live with. Then, because I got trafficked by a diplomat, they always look for me, trying to harm me and stuff, and to change my name is hard."



There should be stronger enforcement of existing laws to **hold buyers and traffickers accountable.**

"My firm belief is that a lot of the problem with human trafficking is that the buyers are very rarely held accountable and if they are, it's on a very limited basis and also with very, very biased views. The police when they arrest the buyers, if they ever do, are actually usually pretty polite to them but when they arrest the people being sold, it's usually a whole another story. I've very rarely, if ever actually, seen a buyer get anything more than a slap from the wrist."

"The other part is decriminalizing the people who are being exploited. Regardless how people identify, stop criminalizing them, because I think that it's super big, that is still like when in jail, people who are loitering for purposes of prostitution, a lot of times, in a lot of cities, they are doing raids, and instead of holding accountable the sex buyers, they are put in jail, charging the people who are just there."

"I would like to see more prosecution of Johns and buyers. I'd like to see more criminalization of being a buyer and prosecution of that."

"Holding accountable sex buyers, I think that that's a big one, especially when we are talking about trafficking. Laws are very, very focused on girls when they are traffickers, but not really when the buyer is a trafficker at the same time or when there's no clear exploiter. When there's a lot of psychological coercion involved, I think that it's very hard to prosecute, like a case of human trafficking. Again, that's very important."

"I was also thinking to make it to where if our pimps get caught, when they get caught, instead of just paying restitution to the state, that they should pay to unemployment, and unemployment should pay the survivor because they've already made so much money off of us that we need to have some type of income for us."



What is the National Survivor Study?

The National Survivor Study (NSS) is a scientifically rigorous project that puts the lived experiences of survivors at the forefront of the anti-trafficking movement to provide insight into Polaris's strategies, policies, and evaluation frameworks. In full partnership with survivors, the NSS also aims to inform the anti-trafficking movement more broadly by filling key evidence gaps that exist in the field.

Completed Activities

- Held focus group discussions with people traditionally excluded from research on human trafficking
 - e.g., survivors living in rural areas, Native American / Native Alaskan survivors, Black / African American survivors, Latinx / Hispanic survivors, LGBTQ+ survivors, immigrant survivors, male survivors, gender-diverse survivors, and Asian American & Pacific Islander survivors
- Conducted interviews with other professionals and lived-experience experts from the anti-trafficking field
- Applied survivor feedback into survey questions
- Conducted an online survey with survivors across the United States

Current Activities

- Summarize and share key findings from focus groups, interviews, and online survey data

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