

# Human trafficking bills take on victim blaming, witness reform and harsher penalties

By [Chris Ullery](#)

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A collection of bills passed the state House this week prohibiting the use of sexual history of a victim of human trafficking as a defense in court, making trafficking infants a felony and expanding the “unlawful contact with a minor” definition.

Several bills moving through the General Assembly could mean harsher sentences for human traffickers and more protections for victims.

[Six bills](#) passed the House Wednesday, nearly all unanimously, combating human trafficking, which advocates estimate to be a \$150 billion worldwide industry and one of the third largest criminal activities in the world, according to the FBI.

Among the potential new laws is a bill banning accused traffickers from using a victim’s past sexual history as a defense, a form of victim blaming, and another by a Bucks County lawmaker allowing expert witness testimony on “the dynamics of sexual violence.”

“(House Bill 2175) specifically deals with allowing expert testimony in the court room to show jurors what these victims go through ... and be a voice for victims,” Rep. Meghan Schroeder, R-29, of Buckingham, said Wednesday.

Schroeder added those expert witnesses could offer insight to issues like delayed reporting and the effects of grooming — which the [Stop Human Trafficking Action Group](#) describes as a way of “breaking down” victims into servitude.

“This \$150 billion industry of human trafficking needs to stop, and this is how we’re going to start doing that,” Schroeder said.

Five bills will now move on to the Senate, including a bill making trafficking of an infant a first degree felony, while another bill goes to Gov. Tom Wolf’s desk to sign.

That bill, Senate Bill 60, would “sharply increase penalties” for both human traffickers and the solicitors of trafficking victims.

Bucks County District Attorney Matt Weintraub said in an email Thursday the bills were “an excellent step” to protect “our most vulnerable victims.”

“We can use all the legislative assistance we can get when it comes to prosecution, sentencing and rehabilitation of sex trafficking offenders in order to better protect us, and in helping to explain victim behavior in these cases,” Weintraub wrote.

The House votes came a day after approving a resolution recognizing January as Human Trafficking Awareness Month, introduced the past two years by Rep. Wendi Thomas, R-178, of Northampton.



Thomas, who cosponsored a companion bill to SB 60, described the bills as a “moral obligation” of all elected officials.

“This legislation will finally give us the tools we need to support the victims, because they are truly victims, and to prosecute the people who perpetrate the crimes,” Thomas added this week.

Thomas hosted a Southeastern Republican Caucus hearing in New Hope last February that included testimony from trafficking victims as part of creating that house companion bill.

The Bucks County Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA) began a project in 2013 to fight human trafficking, the Bucks Coalition Against Trafficking.

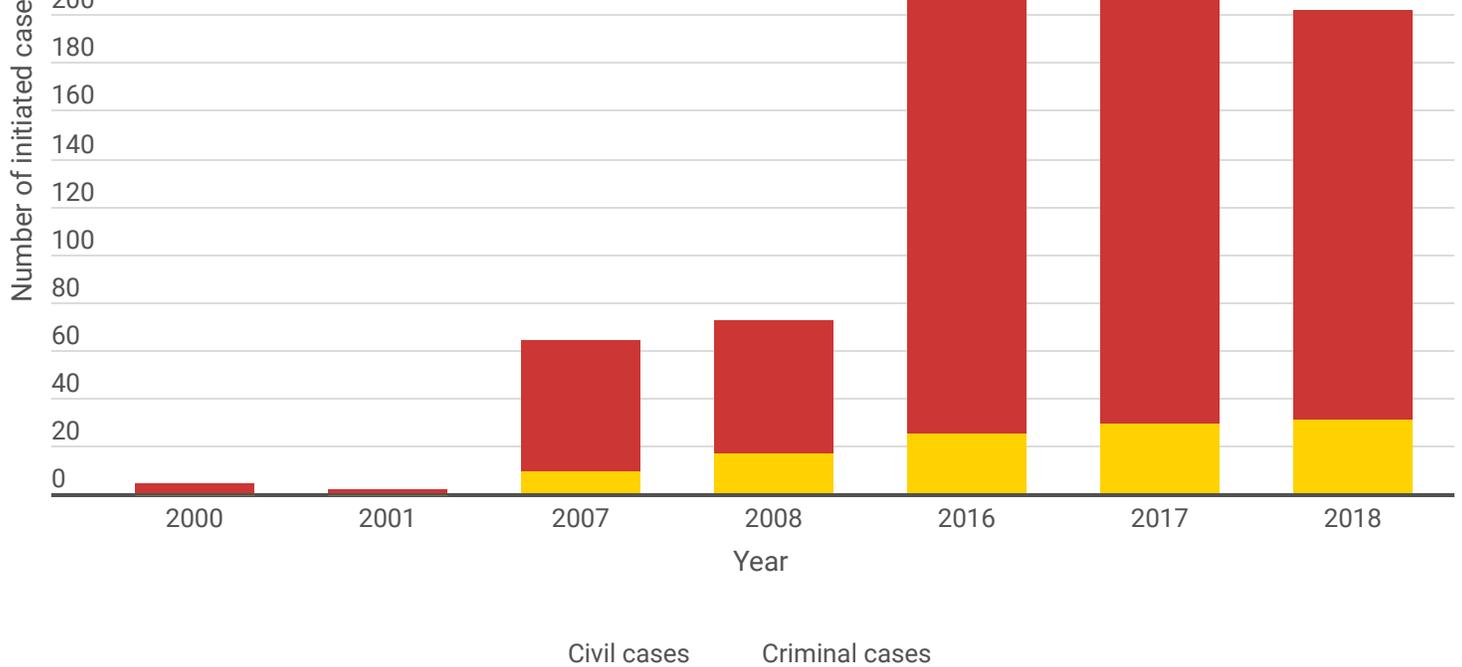
More information on the county coalition can be found at www.novabucks.org.

The coalition urges anyone who is or knows a victim of human trafficking to call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, text 233733 or report an online tip at www.traffickingresourcecenter.org.

# STATE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

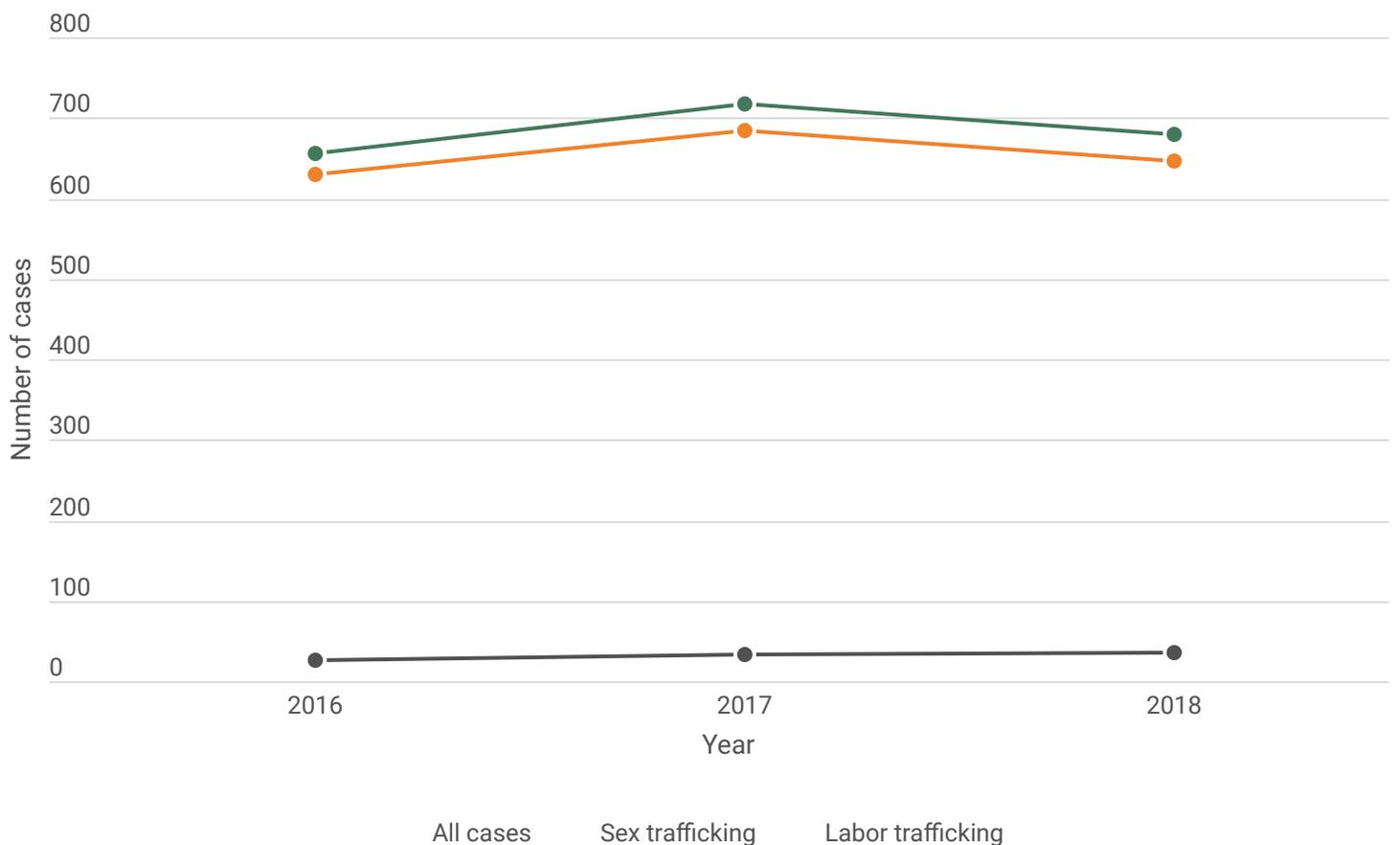
The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 made human trafficking a federal crime, providing more protection for victims over time. In 2018, there were 711 total active human trafficking cases in federal courts. Of those, 202 were newly initiated, down 25.2% from 2017 when 270 new criminal and civil cases were filed.





## Sex trafficking versus labor trafficking

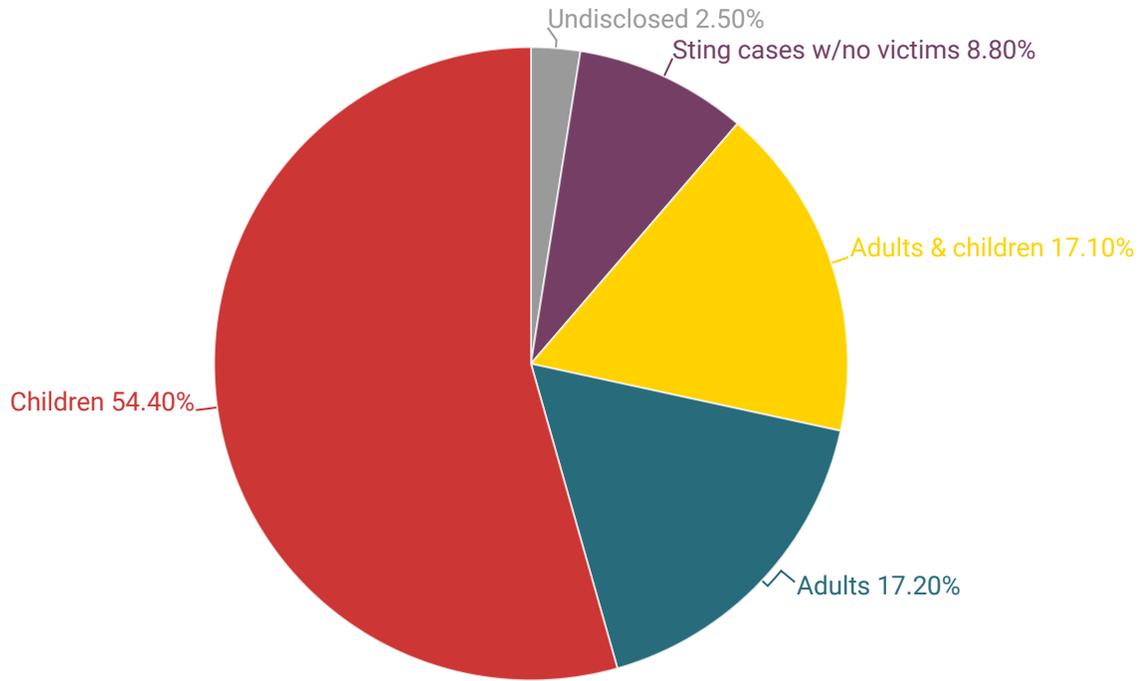
Human trafficking includes the trafficking of persons for both commercial sexual activity and labor. The vast majority of cases are sex trafficking.



More than half of victims of sex trafficking in 2018 were children, while victims of labor trafficking more likely to be adults.

Sex trafficking victims

Labor trafficking victims



Source: Human Trafficking Institute 2018 Federal Human Trafficking Report