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U.S. DOJ AWARDS PLYMOUTH COUNTY DA'S OFFICE, HEALTH IMPERATIVES WITH \$1.5 M GRANT TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

BROCKTON – The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs has awarded the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office and health and trauma services agency Health Imperatives \$1.5 million in funding to bolster efforts to investigate and prosecute human trafficking cases and get victims vital services.

On September 21, the Office for Victims of Crime awarded more than \$97.4 million to state, local and tribal jurisdictions, service providers and task forces all over the country. OJP's National Institute of Justice awarded the remaining \$3.5 million to support research and evaluation on human trafficking. The Plymouth County District Attorney's Office (PCDAO) and Health Imperatives were each awarded \$750,000 as part of the grant. Health Imperatives is a non-profit, community-based organization headquartered in Brockton, that address the health and safety needs of low-income, vulnerable individuals and families in Southeastern Massachusetts.

"My office continues to aggressively prosecute those who manipulate, abuse, and sell human beings for profit," DA Cruz said. "At the same time, we work just as hard to provide access to trauma sensitive services to help victims recover and return to a healthy and safe life. We are grateful to the Department of Justice for once again funding our innovative initiatives here in Plymouth County, and we believe our strong partnerships, with agencies like Health Imperatives, puts us in the best position to receive these funding opportunities. Over the 19 years that I have been District Attorney, we have successfully implemented federally funded projects like Project Safe Neighborhoods, Drug Free Communities, and our Drug-Exposed Children's Initiative, and I look forward to working with Health Imperatives, and our law enforcement partners, to further our success in addressing human trafficking."

Julia Kehoe, President and CEO of Health Imperatives said, "We are honored to partner with the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office to create a collaborative task force to address human trafficking. We are seeing increasing numbers of human trafficking victims across our programs and services. This grant allows us to put a

spotlight on this critically important issue and work together with the District Attorney's office to identify strategies that will increase awareness of human trafficking in our community and deliver much-needed services to victims."

Human Trafficking is one of the fastest-growing criminal enterprises in the United States and is a pervasive issue in Massachusetts, the last state to implement human trafficking legislation. While the law has brought much-needed publicity and a sense of urgency to the issue, communities continue to struggle with a lack of resources and training on trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and victim services.

The PCDAO and Health Imperatives were the only grant recipients in Massachusetts of the 30 awarded agencies and programs from 11 states. The Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking program awards more than \$22.7 million. OVC awards more than \$17.7 million total to 27 programs to support the effectiveness of collaborative and multidisciplinary task forces to combat human trafficking. The purpose is to develop and strengthen programs for victims of human trafficking, including enhancing the capacity of law enforcement and other stakeholders to identify victims and provide justice for victims through the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers.

The Plymouth County District Attorney's Office and Health Imperatives will work collaboratively to use the funding to create the Plymouth County Human Trafficking Task Force. The task force will be comprised of members representing a diverse array of community stakeholders relevant to addressing human trafficking issues. The Task Force intends to include members from local hospitals, educational institutions, law enforcement, non-profits and faith communities.

PCDAO and Health Imperatives will also utilize the funding to hire a project coordinator for the task force, who will work with the task force's executive committee to get the word out and improve public awareness and survivor outreach efforts. The coordinator will also conduct a community assessment to update data and determine where outreach is needed in the county.

As part of the task force, a law enforcement subcommittee will be implemented and comprised of PCDAO, and local, state, and federal law enforcement, including the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts. This subcommittee will be dedicated to sharing human trafficking intelligence, discussing investigations, coordinating cross-jurisdictional efforts and referral of cases.

To increase the capacity of PCDAO to successfully prosecute human trafficking cases, the funding will be used to add a full-time Assistant District Attorney solely dedicated to the Human Trafficking Unit. The grant money will also be used to purchase cellphone investigative technology, and two laptops to present digital evidence at trial, which is significant to improving conviction rates.

Health Imperatives will utilize the grant money to elevate their services for trafficking victims by developing a Human Trafficking Unit within their Violence Intervention and Prevention Department. This unit will include a Survivor Specialist, who will execute human trafficking direct service intervention programming, and an Outreach and Training Coordinator, who will develop trainings for staff and external partners. Together, they will deepen Health Imperatives' infrastructure to support human trafficking victims.

Additionally, Health Imperatives will use this grant to implement victim-centered, trauma-informed services so that they will be able to guide victims to specialized human trafficking programs when victims are identified, alongside victims identified through the Law Enforcement Subcommittee.