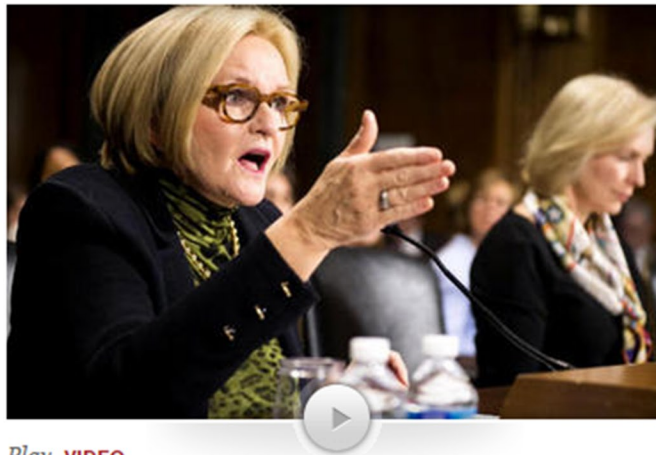


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Human trafficking cases increase more than 50 percent in Florida



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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Officials say the number of human trafficking cases have increased more than 50 percent in the state from the previous year.

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) says Florida received 1,892 reports of human trafficking. That's a 54 percent increase from the previous year.

The increase in reported allegations of human trafficking was due in large part to increased training and a new screening tool developed between DCF, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and the attorney general.

The Statewide Council on Human Trafficking also implemented specialized training for first responders and other child welfare professionals to help recognize the signs.

"The increase in reports of human trafficking is evidence that the coordinated effort across state agencies to train professionals is increasing awareness and bringing more of these cases to light," DCF Secretary Mike Carroll said in a news release Friday. "Florida must continue to create and implement a continuum of services that addresses all aspects of a survivor's life including physical, social, emotional and spiritual health."

The DCF tracks human trafficking by three primary categories: sexual exploitation by a non-caregiver, such as an adult entertainment club or escort service; sexual exploitation by a parent, guardian or caregiver; and labor trafficking.

A U.N. report released last month found that nearly three-quarters of all human trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls, and that trafficked men and boys are typically used as forced laborers, soldiers and slaves. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime's report also found that children comprise nearly a third of trafficking victims globally.