



## **RHODE ISLAND TRUCKING ASSOCIATION, INC.**

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February 12, 2025

Representative Evan Shanley  
Chairman, Committee on State Government and Elections  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Letter of Support - H 5231

Chairman Shanley and Committee Members:

The Rhode Island Trucking Association (RITA) represents 500 member companies, mostly our state's small businesses who operate trucks, and more broadly, the 3.5 million truck drivers that traverse our country each day and serve as the eyes and ears of our state and national highways.

It is estimated that human trafficking, both sex trafficking and forced labor, generates more than \$150 billion dollars annually in illicit profit for traffickers and those who assist in facilitating this heinous crime. And while these figures are global, it is well known that human trafficking exists up and down the northeast corridor where our professional truck drivers work and live. In many cases, solicitation of victims occurs at warehouses and box store loading docks, in parking lots, and in highway rest areas and truck stops. These are the locations that truck drivers frequent which is why it is critically important to deploy the instincts of truckers in the war against human trafficking by integrating awareness training directly into the commercial driver license procurement process. H-5231 would mandate and codify this critical process.

Our industry's greatest resource and advocate against human trafficking is the national organization, Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT). RITA has a longstanding partnership with TAT and has used and distributed its training resources to countless member companies and our own Division of Motor Vehicles to educate and "TAT Certify" existing and newly licensed truck drivers. Through the combined efforts of TAT, law enforcement and the trucking industry, hundreds of human trafficking victims have been rescued and thousands of potential instances of human trafficking have been thwarted. Most notable is the fact that national data on human trafficking shows that the majority of truck drivers who report suspected activity to law enforcement gained the awareness tools through TAT training.

In closing, we thank you for your consideration and encourage you to support this worthy legislation which would align Rhode Island with some 15 other states who have already enacted such measures.

Very truly yours,

  
Christopher J. Maxwell  
President & CEO  
Rhode Island Trucking Association, Inc.



EXCLUSIVE R.I. AFFILIATE

# Industry Watch

## Perspective

# Trucking Leads in Trafficking Battle

By Esther Goetsch and Sarah Rajtik  
TAT and American Trucking Associations

Driving down a road in Missouri in 2022, a family encountered a woman walking alone, disoriented and not dressed for the conditions. Alarm bells sounded in the head of the car's driver. He pulled over and asked if she needed help. Establishing a rapport to overcome her apprehension, he eventually learned the heartrending and disturbing truth: She had just escaped after a month of being drugged and raped while her child was held hostage. He put her in contact with law enforcement and the resources she desperately needed.

The horrors of human trafficking are simply unfathomable. It almost defies belief that such a heinous crime could exist in the modern age. Yet, tragically, it not only exists but thrives on the periphery outside sports and entertainment venues, alongside highways and inside our communities. The statistics are sobering. In 2023, over 9,600 potential human trafficking cases, encompassing nearly 17,000 potential victims, were reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. That same year, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children was informed about more than 18,400 possible cases of child sex trafficking. But these numbers only scratch the surface. Reports of human trafficking to state and local law enforcement agencies are not always passed up the chain to nationwide organizations and federal agencies. Hundreds of thousands of cases go unseen and unreported annually.

Fortunately for the woman in Missouri, the driver of the car that night was a professional truck driver by day. Bob Bramwell's employer had recently enrolled him in a program run by TAT, which teaches members of the transportation industry how to spot instances of human trafficking and how to fight it. Bramwell credits this guidance with helping him to quickly connect the dots. Initially, the woman insisted she was fine, but she clearly wasn't. By gently persisting, he uncovered her shocking circumstances and got her and her child to safety.

Traffickers rely on the transportation network to

relocate to avoid detection. This makes truckers like Bramwell indispensable in the effort to disrupt trafficking rings. Truck drivers bring eyes and ears to every corner of the country. The training TAT provides harnesses their compassion and vigilance to enable them to identify victims.

The criminals who inflict such evil hide in plain sight, counting on good people to be unfamiliar with human trafficking and thus overlook their sinister deeds. TAT has thwarted their attempts to lurk in the shadows by equipping more than 2 million people who work in transportation with the ability to recognize warning signs.

The scope of human trafficking is too vast for one industry to handle alone. To make a significant difference, all Americans have a responsibility to be aware so that they're prepared to assist at any time. January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, an opportunity to commit to this battle by taking advantage of the plentiful resources available. TAT offers free courses to transportation professionals and educational materials at no cost to anyone who wants to learn more and make a difference.

Also, Congress has a role to play. The trucking industry supports the National Human Trafficking Database Act and applauds Sens. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), and Reps. Kevin Kiley (R-Calif.), Harriet Hageman (R-Wyo.) and Hank Johnson (D-Ga.), and former Rep. Yadira Caraveo (D-Colo.), for authoring it. This bill will improve data-sharing partnerships, maximizing the effectiveness of tips from the public and enhancing law enforcement's ability to arrest predators. The faster the Senate and

House pass this bill, the more lives will be saved.

In the new year, let's resolve to take concrete steps that will bring to justice the depraved individuals who exploit our community's most vulnerable members. Together, we can put an end to these abominable acts and rescue countless victims from the horrors of human trafficking.

*Goetsch is executive director of TAT and vice chair of the USDOT Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking. Rajtik is chief operating officer of American Trucking Associations and a board member of TAT.*



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