



In Plain Sight: FBI Agent reveals disturbing trends in human trafficking in Eastern Oregon

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NORTHEAST OREGON — A stark reality of human trafficking trends in Oregon has been unveiled, shedding light on the disturbing prevalence of both sex and labor trafficking within the state.

Elkhorn Media Group recently sat down with FBI Supervisory Special Agent Travis Ostrich for an exclusive interview on the human trafficking issue that he says “is hiding in plain sight in Oregon.”

Special Agent Ostrich, who works out of the FBI’s Portland office, says Oregon ranks among the top 20 states for sex trafficking and holds the alarming 23rd position for labor trafficking on a national scale.

“Human trafficking is a pervasive issue in Oregon, with the I-5 Corridor serving as a conduit for these crimes from Washington to California,” Agent Ostrich stated. “Each year we average about 250 individuals being trafficked in Oregon.”

The I-84 corridor in Eastern Oregon, particularly around Ontario near the Oregon-Idaho border, has become a hotspot for sex trafficking, with noticeable signs at rest stops and other locations.

“It’s concerning how prevalent sex trafficking is, especially along I-84. The signs are there, quite literally,” said Agent Ostrich

Federal law defines severe human trafficking as:

- Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, coercion or in which the person induced to perform such an act is under 18.
- The recruitment, transportation, harboring, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion, for the purposes of subjecting that person to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world today. It is tied with arms as the second largest international criminal industry – behind drug dealing.

The DOJ estimates that between 14,500 and 17,500 people are trafficked into the country each year.

Contrary to Hollywood portrayals, labor trafficking often involves migrants lacking immigration documentation, coerced into working on farms or in factories.

"It's not about kidnapping children; it's about trafficking migrants across the interstate to work in farms or factories," said Ostrich. "It's a form of modern slavery."

Ostrich explained the breakdown of human trafficking into sex and labor components, with a particular focus on sex trafficking, which constitutes a majority of the FBI's efforts and collaboration with the United States Attorney's Office.

"Sex trafficking is a priority for us. About 25% of cases involve minors aged 9 to 17, and we're committed to addressing this heinous crime," said Ostrich. "Our main mission is to get these kids off the streets to get them into homes. To get them support and protection from these horrible criminals."

Ostrich also emphasized the FBI's collaboration with local law enforcement agencies and highlighted the unified front formed by various agencies to combat this pervasive issue.

"We have a lot of agencies working together, collaborating, using our tools and resources to be proactive in the community and raise awareness," Agent Ostrich added. "All law enforcement knows just how large and horrible of an issue this is in the Pacific Northwest."

Agent Ostrich acknowledged the challenges faced by the FBI in investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases, particularly the difficulty in breaking the cycle of victim mentality, which often sees individuals returning to the streets despite intervention efforts.

"It's frustrating, but our main goal is to help the victims and let them know they're not alone," he stressed. "It's not hard for us to investigate and go after the criminals, it's the victim trying to get them support and let them know that they're okay."

In eastern Oregon, Agent Ostrich says while the priority is rescuing the victims of trafficking and prosecuting offenders, he says the FBI works to bring down the organizations that promote it, such as gangs.

"If we can get to those larger groups, we might be able to bring other charges outside of just human trafficking," said Ostrich. "We can also get them for illegal weapons to narcotics to other types of violations. These would help stop those gangs and stop these pimps from trafficking."

Public awareness and education were emphasized as crucial in preventing human trafficking. Agent Ostrich urged citizens to be vigilant for signs of abuse, broken homes, and unexplained income in minors.

"Don't turn a blind eye. If you see a child or anyone that looks like they could be in trouble, call the authorities," Ostrich said.

"Education is the priority portion of this to be proactive and stop it from happening. It's looking for signs of abuse, it's looking for broken homes and looking for people that need help that don't have a voice" he concluded.

For more information on human trafficking, [click here to visit the FBI's website.](#)





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