

Human Trafficking Annual Report (2025)



Tennessee Bureau of Investigation

Human Trafficking Unit

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State of Tennessee

Human Trafficking Annual Report (2025)

This report is submitted by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), Human Trafficking Unit (HTU) and as set forth in Pub. Ch. 3 (2023) requiring by December 1, 2024, and by each December 1 thereafter, the TBI to submit a report on child and human trafficking crimes and trends in Tennessee to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Speaker of the Senate.

This report provides an overview of TBI's efforts to combat human trafficking in the State of Tennessee.

Overview

The purpose of this report is to illustrate the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's (TBI) response to human trafficking in the state of Tennessee. This report aims to highlight and provide an overview of the TBI Human Trafficking Unit (HTU), the Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline (TNHTH), course instruction on human trafficking provided to law enforcement and civilians, proactive law enforcement operations, as well as improvement and investments made to increase prevention and enforcement efforts in the state.

Historical Context

The TBI and Vanderbilt University conducted a study to address concerns regarding human trafficking across Tennessee in 2011¹. As a result of the study, the TBI created a specialized unit to assist in combatting human trafficking across the state – the Human Trafficking Unit. Legislation was later passed which designated the TBI as the lead law enforcement agency in the state with original jurisdiction over human trafficking offenses.

In 2011, the Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline (TNHTH) was created as a result of Pub. Ch. 435². In 2015, Pub. Ch. 503 was passed designating a total of four (4) TBI Special Agent positions to investigate and develop criminal cases involving human trafficking offenses³. In addition, the passing of Pub. Ch. 503 mandated the development of a human trafficking course of instruction designed for law enforcement and various other agencies. Human trafficking course instruction was also required by Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (POST) for certification as a police officer in the state of Tennessee.

In 2015, Pub. Ch. 510 mandated the formation of the Human Trafficking Advisory Council to be led by the TBI⁴. The Advisory Council's overall purpose is to develop a statewide council for the prevention of human trafficking, and to provide assessments, best practices, and actionable recommendations to combat human trafficking in the state of Tennessee.

In 2021, Governor Lee and the General Assembly awarded an additional five (5) Special Agent positions designated to the HTU to aid in combatting human trafficking. Additionally, the HTU were designated 2 Intelligence Analysts for investigative support in 2025.

Unit Structure

The HTU began in 2011 with an Assistant Special Agent in Charge and two (2) Intelligence Analysts. In 2015, the HTU gained 4 Special Agents to investigate and develop criminal

¹ *Tennessee Human Sex Trafficking and Its Impact on Children and Youth*. (2011). (n.d.).

² Pub. Ch. No. 435

³ Pub. Ch. No. 503

⁴ Pub. Ch. No. 510

cases involving human trafficking offenses. Today, the HTU has a total of nine (9) Special Agent positions assigned across the state dedicated to conducting investigations and training. Currently, the HTU has divided the state into 4 regions to combat human trafficking, (1) West Region, (2) Middle Region, (3) East Region, and (4) Upper East Region. HTU Special Agents are assigned 2 per West Region, East Region, and Upper East Region with 3 positions dedicated to the Middle Region along with two (2) Intelligence Analysts that provide statewide investigative support (see Figure 1).

The TBI HTU is tasked with investigating human trafficking (sex and labor), assisting in proactive operations, and prosecution efforts to ensure the individuals responsible for such acts are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. The TBI HTU also provides course instruction on human trafficking to local and state law enforcement agencies to increase capacity for investigations statewide. In addition, the TBI HTU provides education and awareness to civilians to ensure proper identification and response to incidents involving human trafficking.

Figure 1

Human Trafficking Unit – Designated Regions



Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline Summary

The Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline (TNHTH) was established in accordance with the “Tennessee Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline Act” under T.C.A. § 39-13-313 (2011)⁵ which mandated a hotline to be enacted and maintained by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI). The TNHTH is maintained by trained personnel available to answer calls from anywhere in the State of Tennessee, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. All incoming calls to the hotline are logged by trained personnel and notifications of tips are provided to the necessary services, resources, law enforcement, and/or child welfare organizations.

⁵ Tennessee Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline Act, Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-313 (2011)

The primary mission of TNHHTH is to provide victims and survivors of human trafficking access to services and resources. The TNHHTH aims to work collaboratively through a multi-channel system to streamline information pertaining from tips to provide awareness, identify suspected trafficking activities, and provide referral access to comprehensive services.

Any individual can report a suspected trafficking crime or get help by calling the Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline. The number to contact the TNHHTH hotline is 1-855-55-TNHHTH (6484). Any individual can call the TNHHTH to (1) report a tip, (2) connect to services or access referral information, (3) request information regarding available resources, or (4) request general information. If it is an emergency, individuals are advised to dial 911 or contact the local law enforcement agency.

The TNHHTH number has been made available through public advertisements, billboards, public awareness campaigns, and is provided to the public by law enforcement and non-governmental agencies.

Data Overview

Tips

The TBI Human Trafficking Unit (HTU) receives information pertaining to possible human trafficking activities in the state of Tennessee from the TNHHTH and other related reporting systems such as TipsToTBI, ItHasToStop.Com, Department of Children Services (DCS), the National Human Trafficking Hotline, local law enforcement, and specialized human trafficking units.

Over a 6-year period (from 2020 – 2025), the TBI HTU received a total of 7,510 tips statewide from all reporting systems. In 2025, a total of 1,359 tips were received and the information provided through the tips were streamlined to the appropriate organization(s) to provide necessary services, resources, and law enforcement or child welfare involvement. Figure 2 illustrates the number of tips received statewide from all reporting systems.

The state of Tennessee and the TBI HTU are separated into four geographical regions, (1) West, (2) Middle, (3) East, and (4) Upper East. In 2025, the information collected during hotline calls and other reporting systems listed which resulted in tips was de-identified, aggregated, and analyzed to provide an overview of tips received statewide and by region, as well as the reporting system utilized, reporter category, and trafficking type. The majority of tips (487, 35.84%) originated in the Middle Region, with the second highest proportion of tips (323, 23.77%) reported in the Upper East Region. The West Region received approximately 266 tips (19.57%), while the East Region received approximately 202 tips (14.86%). Figure 3 provides a breakdown of tips received by region in 2025.

Figure 2

Tips Received Statewide

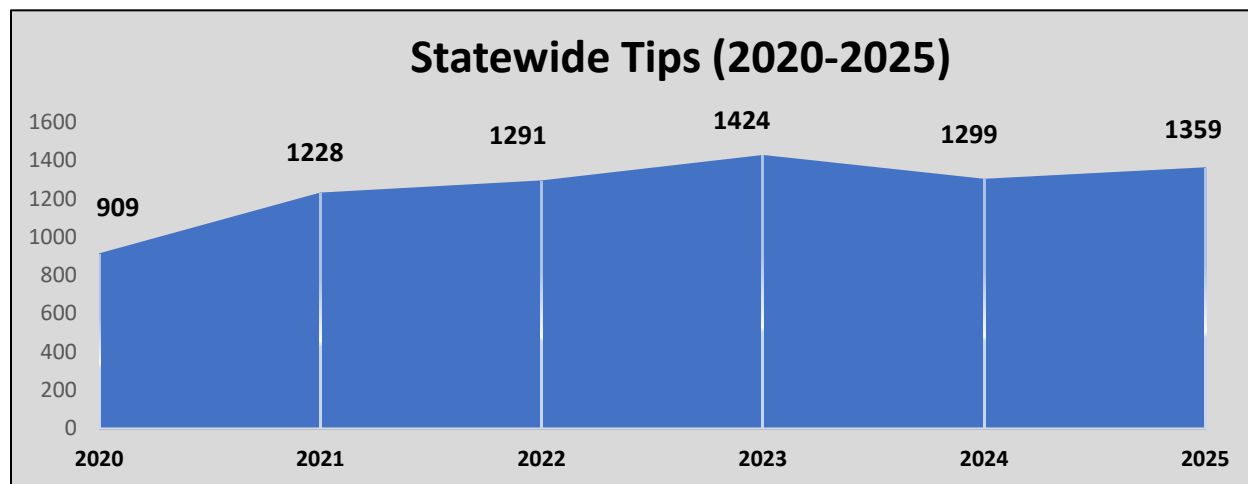
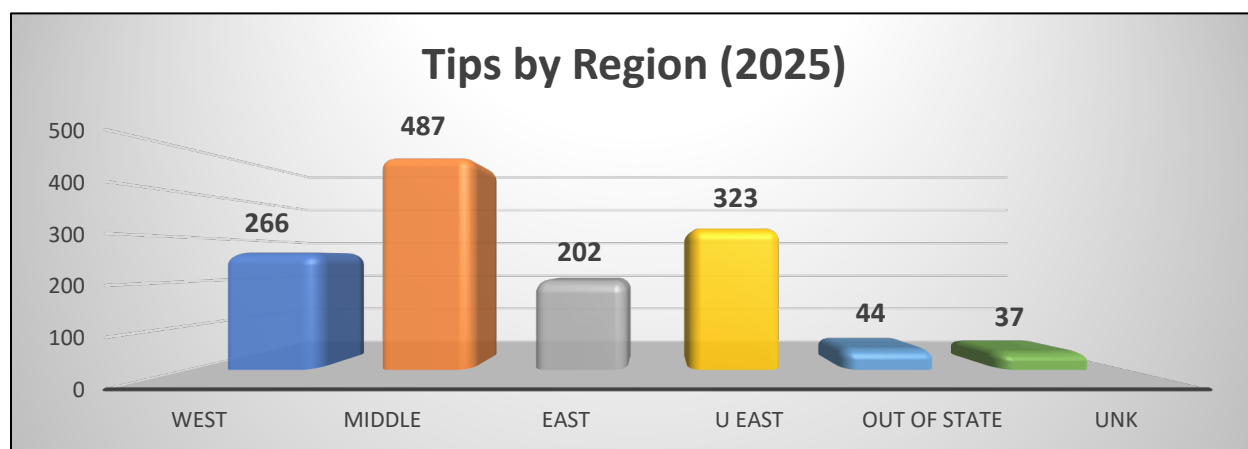


Figure 3

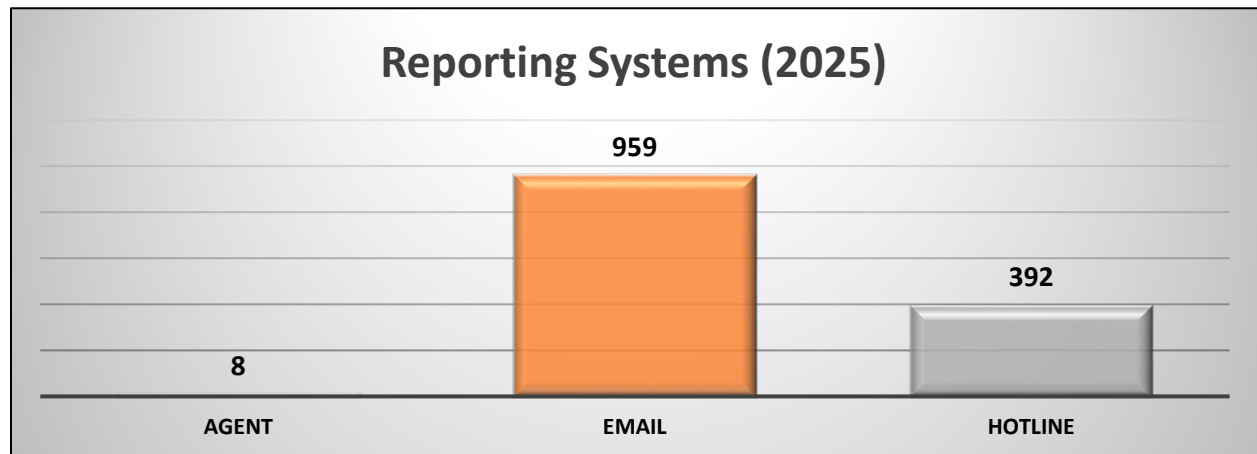
Tips Received by Region



In 2025, a total of 1,359 tips were received across all reporting systems. Reporting systems used to submit tips included the TNHTH, Agent-initiated tips, and other email reporting systems. The majority of tips were submitted through email-based reporting systems (959, 70.57%), while the TNHTH (392, 28.84%) was the second most used system in which a tip was submitted. Agent-initiated tips were minimal, with only 8 (.59%) tips submitted by this reporting system (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

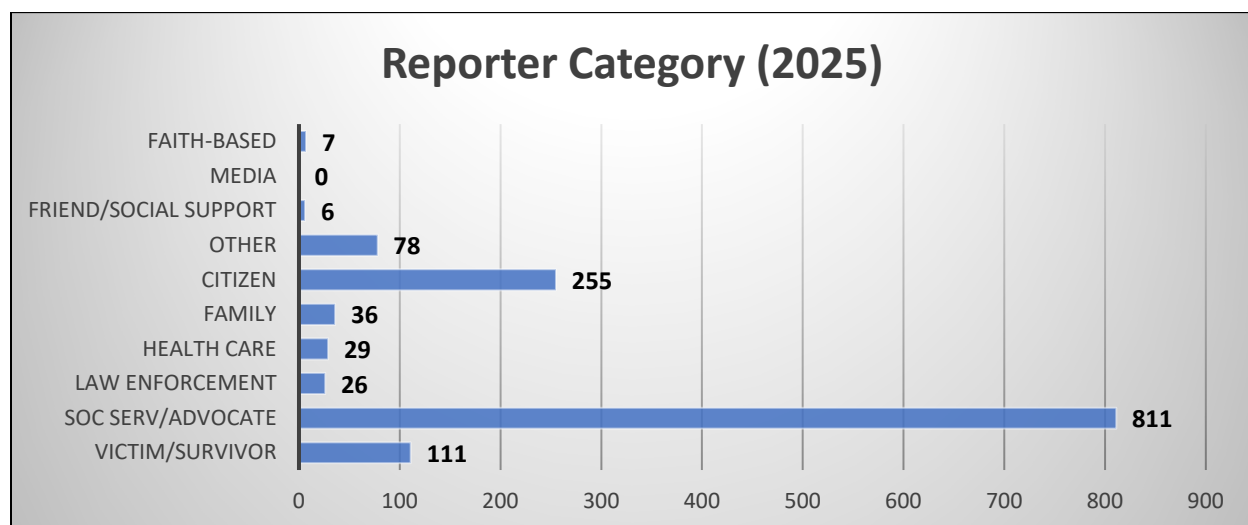
Tip Reporting Systems



Of the total number of tips (1359) received in 2025, reporter categories included citizens of Tennessee and professional sectors/organizations. These categories are broken down in detail in Figure 5. In 2025, the majority of tips (811, 59.68%) regarding incidents of human trafficking were reported by social services and/or advocates. Additionally, the citizens of Tennessee reported 255 (18.76%) tips, while the victim/survivors of trafficking were categorized as the reporter in 111 (8.17%) tips. The majority of tips generated by reporters categorized as social services and/or advocates can be attributed to tips provided to TBI by DCS regarding suspected human trafficking of minors for further investigation.

Figure 5

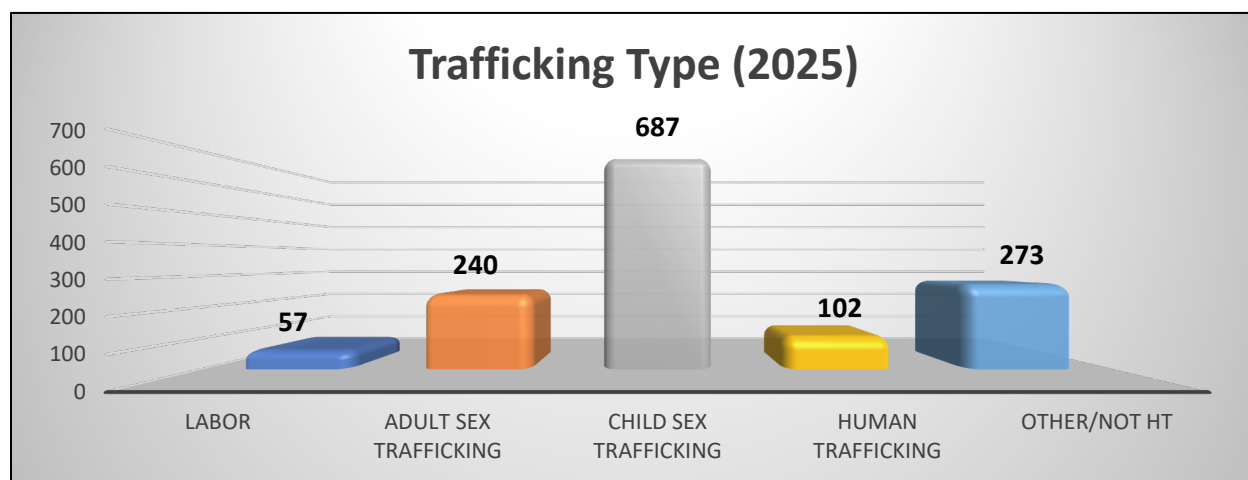
Reporter Category



Information obtained from the reporter can provide context pertaining to the type of trafficking suspected. In 2025, it was indicated that labor trafficking, adult sex trafficking, and minor sex trafficking were occurring. Minor sex trafficking (687, 50.55%) accounted for the most indicated trafficking type reported based on information gathered from individuals in the represented reporter categories. If the trafficking type was not determined based on the information provided or the age of the victim was not indicated by the reporter, the trafficking type was determined to be human trafficking (7.51%, 102). For tips received which indicated other crime(s) and/or incidents not involving human trafficking, the trafficking type was determined to be other/not HT (20.09%, 273) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Tips by Trafficking Type



Note: The "Human Trafficking Type" has been used when the information provided is not clear to determine labor or sex trafficking or when the age of victim is unknown. This classification has caused much confusion and will not be included as a Trafficking Type in future reports.

Case Investigation Types

The TBI HTU receives information from reporting systems pertaining to possible human trafficking activities through tips. While all information is reviewed by investigative personnel, not all tips result in or develop into workable case(s) of human trafficking. This is due to various reasons, some of which include jurisdictional issues, veracity of claims made, and the amount of verifiable information provided in the tip. In addition, the overall lack of information provided by a caller during the reporting process may also impact case substantiation.

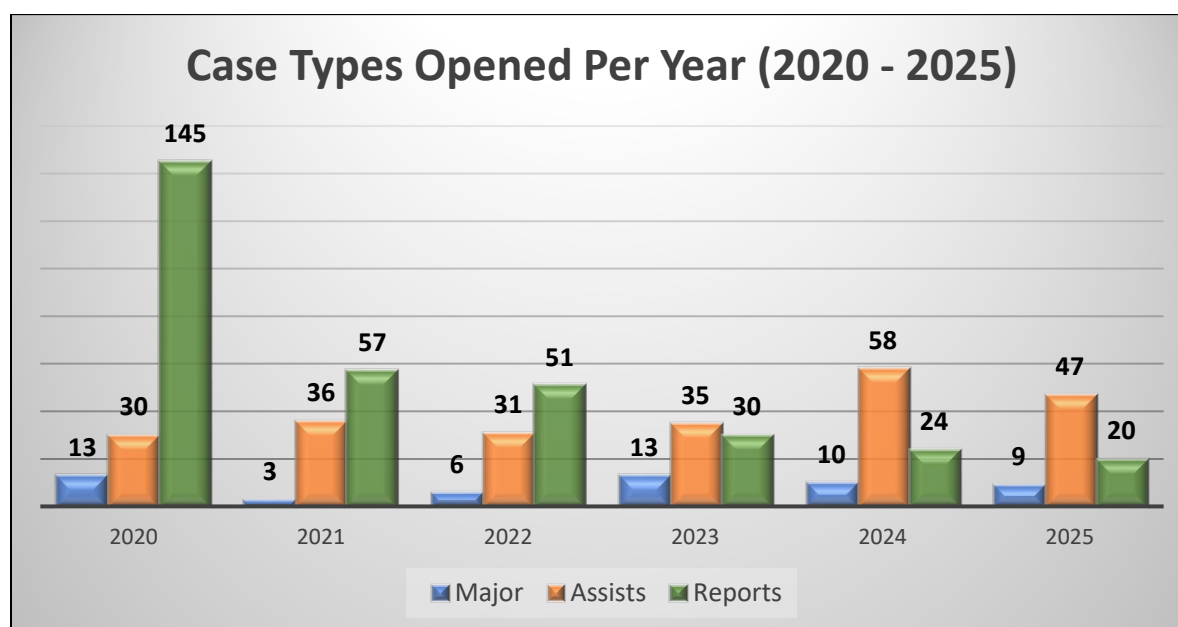
Tips received by the TBI HTU are generated into three case types, (1) major, (2) law enforcement assists, and (3) intelligence based. The "major" case type is led by the TBI HTU, while the "law enforcement assists" case type is led by local law enforcement with

assistance provided by the TBI HTU. The “intelligence-based” case type is generated as a result of tips to further analyze information to guide and/or support additional investigative steps.

Over a 6-year period (from 2020 – 2025), a total of 628 cases were generated by the TBI. Of the 628 cases generated, the HTU opened and led 64 (10.19%) “major” cases, while providing assistance in 237 (37.74%) cases led by local law enforcement. The majority of case types generated over the 6-year period were intelligence-based resulting in 327 (52.07%) cases. In 2025, a total of 76 cases were generated with 9 (11.84%) cases categorized as “major” and led by the TBI HTU, while 47 (61.84%) cases were categorized as “assists” led by local law enforcement with assistance from TBI HTU. “Intelligence-based” case type generated 20 (26.32%) cases to further analyze information and guide investigative decisions. Figure 7 provides a breakdown of case types opened per year from 2020 – 2025.

Figure 7

Human Trafficking Case Types Opened Per Year (2020 – 2025)



Human Trafficking Training

In accordance with T.C.A. § 38-6-114 (2015), the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation implemented a course of instruction on human trafficking to train law enforcement statewide and other governmental officials who are directly involved with human trafficking investigations and complaints, as well as various agencies that may encounter human trafficking or human trafficking victims during service delivery⁶. A Human

⁶ Course of Instruction Concerning Human Trafficking, Tenn. Code Ann. § 38-6-114 (2015)

Trafficking 101 online course of instruction was created and deployed by TBI in March 2016. Additional trainings for human trafficking investigations have since been developed and provided to local law enforcement throughout the state to support the growth of investigative capacity at the local level.

The TBI has trained a number of individuals in human trafficking course instruction. Trainees who attend course instruction on human trafficking provided by TBI are categorized into two groups, (1) law enforcement and (2) civilians. Law enforcement trainees include law enforcement agency personnel and cadets from local and state law enforcement academies across the state. Civilian trainees include but are not limited to individuals from other state agencies, civic groups, churches, schools, healthcare, emergency responders, and community groups. Human trafficking course delivery is provided through an online course and in-person for law enforcement officers. In addition, in-person individualized course delivery is also provided on human trafficking to civilian groups.

Over a 6-year period (from 2020 – 2025), the TBI has trained a total of 27,554 individuals in human trafficking related courses (see Figure 8). In 2025 alone, 5,690 individuals were provided course instruction on human trafficking. These training activities reached both civilians and law enforcement and were primarily delivered through in-person instruction. Civilians made up the majority of individuals (4,845, 85.15%) trained with all training delivered in-person. Law enforcement personnel accounted for 845 (14.85%) of the total individuals trained with 764 (90.41%) receiving course instruction in-person. Table 1 provides a breakdown of trainee categories and course instruction delivery provided in 2025.

Figure 8

Human Trafficking Training (2020 – 2025)

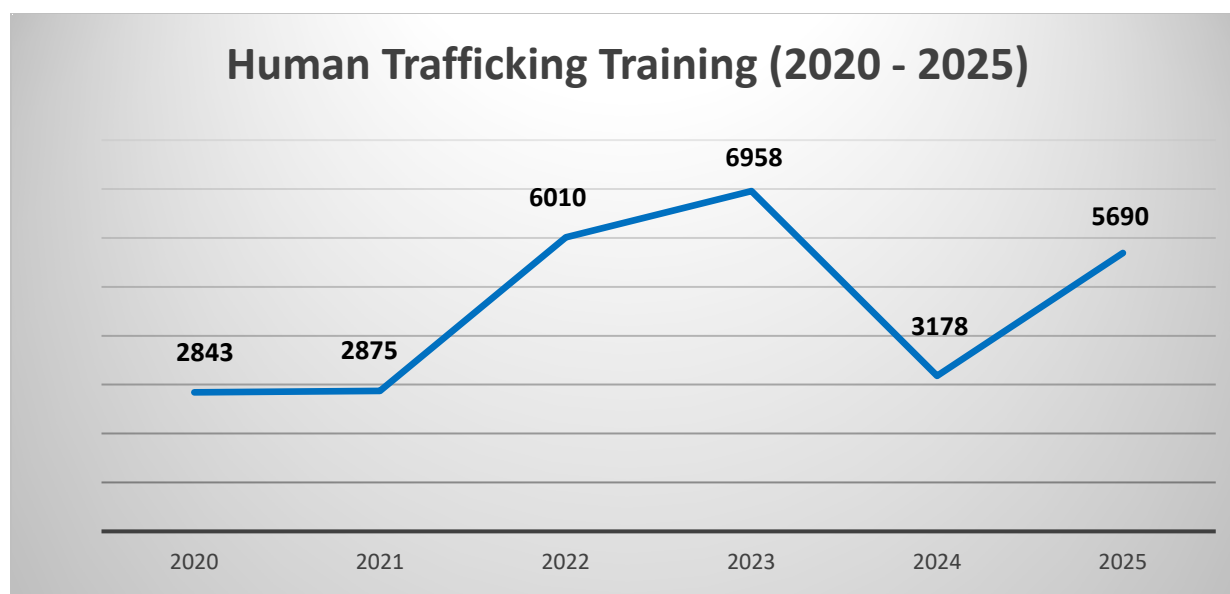


Table 1*Human Trafficking Course Instruction and Delivery (2025)*

	Category		Total (n)
	Law Enforcement (n)	Civilian (n)	
Delivery (%)			
Online	9.59% (81)	0	81
In-person	90.41% (764)	100% (4845)	5609
Total	14.85% (845)	85.15% (4845)	5690

Note: Percentages represent the proportion of individuals within each trainee category who received instruction via each delivery method. The values in parentheses represent the number of individuals trained, (n).

Human Trafficking Proactive Operations

The TBI HTU conducts proactive law enforcement operations in conjunction with local law enforcement to combat human trafficking across the state of Tennessee. Proactive operations focus on victim identification, support, and recovery, as well as supply-and-demand reduction, and intelligence gathering. Suspects involved in human trafficking and other illegal activity are arrested by the TBI HTU and/or local law enforcement both during proactive operations and as a result of other investigations developed from enforcement activities.

Over a 6-year period (from 2020 – 2025), the TBI HTU has conducted a total of 103 proactive law enforcement operations. In 2025, a total of 29 proactive operations were conducted which included covert hotel-based operations and recovery-based operations. Of the 29 proactive operations conducted, 7 operations focused specifically on identification and recovery of possible victims of sex trafficking. During these operations, law enforcement contact was made with 72 individuals from a commercial sex setting suspected of being possible victims of trafficking. Figure 9 shows a breakdown of the total number of proactive law enforcement operations conducted from 2020 – 2025.

Over a 6-year period (from 2020 – 2025), the TBI HTU has made a total of 592 arrests involving proactive operations, as well as other enforcement and investigation activities. In 2025, a total of 161 arrests were made by the TBI HTU for human trafficking and other associated crimes (see Figure 10).

Figure 9

Number of Proactive Operations (2020 - 2025)

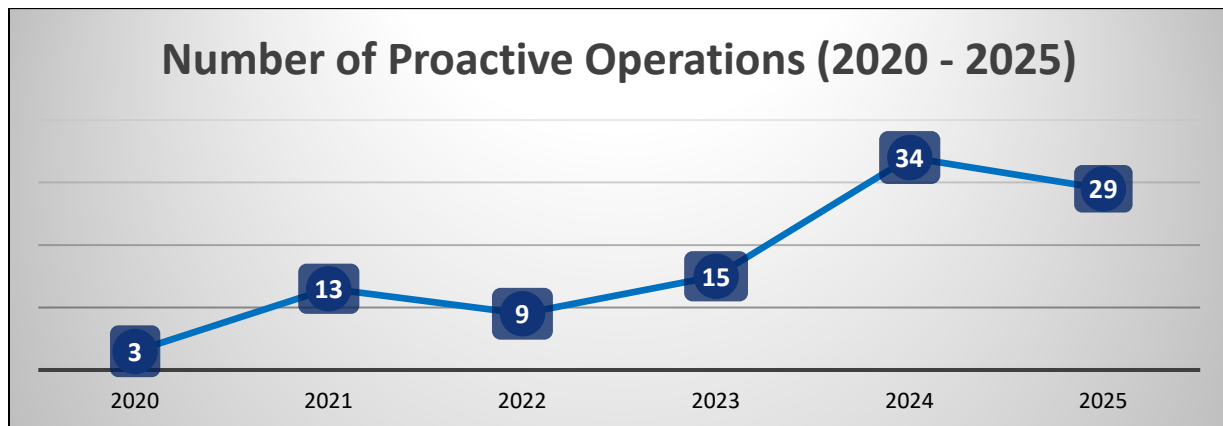
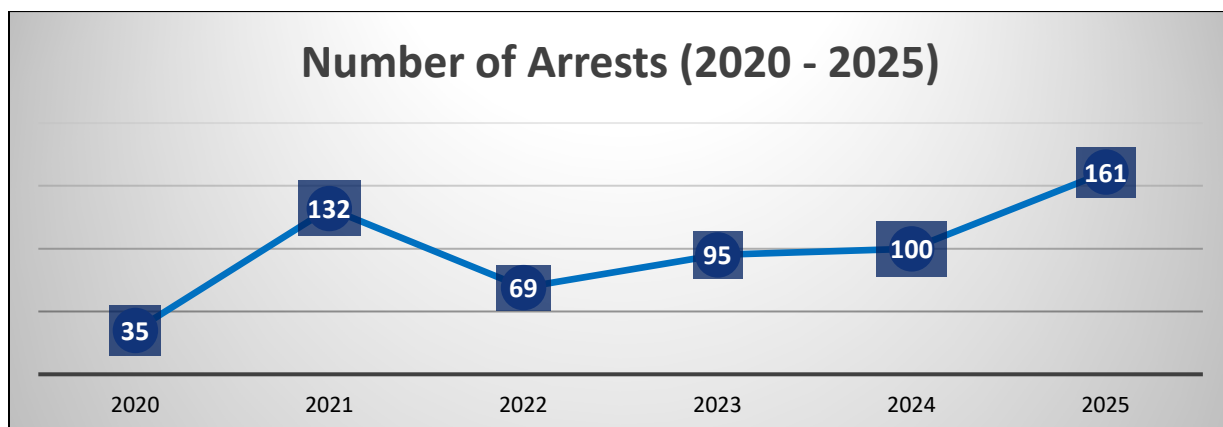


Figure 10

Number of Arrests (2020 – 2025)



Improvements and Investments

Ink of Hope Act

Pub. Ch. 19, The Ink of Hope Act requires tattoo operators and tattoo artists to complete up to one hour of training on recognizing and reporting signs of human trafficking⁷. This free online training can be found at <https://inkofhopetraining.org/>.

⁷Ink of Hope Act, Pub. Ch. 19, 114th Gen. Assemb. (Tenn. 2026)

Tennessee Human Trafficking Task Force

The Tennessee Human Trafficking Task Force (THTTF) is currently supported by the FY24 Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force grant provided by the Department of Justice, through the Office for Victims of Crime, to assist in establishing and sustaining a statewide, multidisciplinary task force to enhance Tennessee's capacity to combat all forms of human trafficking (sex and labor). The funding aims to build a unified, statewide structure that strengthens statewide coordination, improves investigative and prosecutorial outcomes, and develops/expands comprehensive service coordination and delivery to victims of human trafficking.

The THTTF structure consists of dedicated Task Force personnel which include a Task Force Director and Law Enforcement Liaison housed at the TBI, as well as a Victim Service Provider Liaison housed at AncoraTN. The overarching goal of the Task Force is to create a statewide structure for sustainability of human trafficking efforts in the state of Tennessee to enhance its ability to combat human trafficking.

Prior funding from the FY 2019 Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force grant assisted the TBI in initiating the beginning efforts to build capacity and support for the statewide task force. The FY 2019 Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force grant also provided funding to the TBI to build law enforcement and investigative capacity by adding commissioned local law enforcement officers as Task Force Agents (TFAs). Currently, the TBI has 16 TFAs assigned to the THTTF from local agencies across the state of Tennessee.

Conclusion

The TBI greatly appreciates Governor Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly for the improvements made in the laws on human trafficking in recent years, as well as the considerable investments in the TBI HTU. The implementation of legislation providing stricter punishments for traffickers and additional resources for victims are vital tools in the fight against human trafficking.

The addition of designated Special Agents and Intelligence Analysts positions allocated to the TBI has also enhanced the HTU's ability to identify, respond, investigate, and refer victims to appropriate services. Furthermore, the addition of dedicated Task Force personnel housed at the TBI, funded by the FY24 Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force Grant, has increased the agency's capacity to build sustainable networks and coordinate statewide efforts to enhance collaboration among stakeholders in Tennessee.

For years, Tennessee has implemented policies and reform practices to rally stakeholders together to address human trafficking; however, our work is not finished. We must continue to be the light in the darkness working to identify and respond to the emerging needs of victims and investigations while advancing evidence-based practices, policies, and legislation.