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Agencies Aim at Human Trafficking

By [Debra Dominguez-Lund](#)*Journal Staff Writer*

Twenty-three states have anti-human trafficking laws, but New Mexico is not one of them, state Assistant Attorney General Maria Sanchez-Gagne told law enforcement officials Wednesday.

"It does not have legislation that addresses human trafficking at either the state or local level," said Sanchez-Gagne, who as the state's Border Violence Division director is working to draft such legislation for the 2007 legislative session.

"We need to work together at the local, state and federal level to make this kind of legislation happen," she said. "So far, there hasn't been enough attention given to this issue."

That's why the New Mexico Office of the Attorney General, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Commission and the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs are creating a multiagency volunteer task force to help push for anti-human trafficking legislation and raise awareness of the matter.

The agencies are also hosting their first Human Trafficking Conference, which began Wednesday and will conclude today at the State Bar Association, 5121 Masthead NE, to educate community leaders and law enforcement officials on how to identify the crime, and its victims, and put an end to it.

"Our main mission is to provide training and information about human trafficking to area law enforcement officials and agencies so they can help respond to the needs of human trafficking victims," said Marcie Davis, project director of the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.

The conference brought in guest speakers from a number of area agencies, as well as from the U.S. Department of Justice, the Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking and the U.S. Department of

Homeland Security Miami Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"The main thing to understand about human trafficking is that it has the dynamics of modern-day slavery," said Luis C. deBaca, special litigation counsel for the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. "To effectively respond to this crime, we need to not only prosecute traffickers but help restore the lives of its victims.

"The most vulnerable victims of trafficking include illegal immigrants and those who lack English skills," deBaca said. "U.S. citizens who are most preyed upon by human traffickers are drug addicts, youth, runaways and women— people who traffickers can make promises of love and loyalties to— but hold them to physical, emotional and manipulative abuses."

New Mexico Attorney General Patricia Madrid, who served as a conference hostess, told the assembly that human trafficking is a serious crime for the whole country.

The crime, according to her office, has become the world's fastest-growing enterprise— with profits of up to \$9 billion a year and much of that profit going to organized crime.

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