

Bill Analysis: Countering Human Trafficking Act of 2021

The Countering Human Trafficking Act of 2021, or [S. 2991](#), is a bipartisan bill that would improve and make permanent the Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT), a pilot program which oversees efforts to eradicate human trafficking and bring those responsible to justice. The bill also mandates the development and creation of a series of new technologies that could help law enforcement officials better manage their analytical and data sharing capabilities. The bill was introduced in the Senate on October 18, 2021 by Senator Gary Peters (D-Michigan) and Senator Rob Portman (R-Ohio).

Background

The [CCHT](#) pilot program was [created in September 2020](#) with the goal of helping federal human trafficking investigations and assisting victims. The CCHT is currently staffed by officials from Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations (ICE HSI) and other organizations within the Department of Homeland Security. The center follows a “victim-centered” approach and operates based on a set of principles it calls the “[4 P’s](#)”: prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships.

In June 2021, the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) [concluded](#) that ICE does “not adequately identify and track human trafficking crimes,” and recommended that ICE “improve policies, procedures, and collaboration efforts to assist human trafficking victims.”

Specifically, the Countering Human Trafficking Act of 2021 would:

- **Make permanent the Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT).** The Center would continue to be housed under ICE HSI, and would be required to establish an Operations Unit to support law enforcement investigations into human trafficking, ensure that no goods made using forced labor are imported into the U.S., confirm that no DHS affiliated organizations or individuals are associated with human trafficking, and provide intelligence to ongoing enforcement efforts. The Center would also be required to create a Protection and Awareness Programs Unit, which would be responsible for assisting victims and administering training and public awareness campaigns.
- **Ensure proper funding and staffing for the CCHT.** The CCHT would be staffed with a minimum of 45 employees, who would be responsible for duties such as overseeing ICE’s [Continued Presence Program](#), developing CCHT training materials, engaging with other stakeholders, and data analysis. The bill also appropriates an initial amount of \$14 million for CCHT to carry out its mission.
- **Create a new initiative to modernize CCHT information systems.** The Human Trafficking Information Modernization Initiative would be tasked with:
 - Decreasing response times to obtain victim protections
 - Identifying human trafficking patterns and trends
 - Ensuring the security of sensitive and classified information
 - Automating current manual processes
 - Providing artificial intelligence and machine learning opportunities to increase system capabilities and data collection and analysis

- **Institute congressional reporting requirements highlighting needed resources.** Within one year of the passage of the bill, CCHT would be required to submit a report to Congress identifying any additional legislation that would be necessary in helping to eradicate human trafficking.

Conclusion

The Countering Human Trafficking Act of 2021 is a welcome addition to ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking in the U.S. The bill would make permanent a program that plays a critical role in coordinating and improving counter-trafficking efforts within DHS, and it would improve upon that program by establishing modernized information systems and sharing and developing better analytical tools to track human trafficking.

The National Immigration Forum would like to thank Joshua Rodriguez, policy intern, for his extensive work on this bill analysis.