

Trafficking prevention education to be launched soon locally

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As state Attorney General Xavier Becerra announced the implementation of an Assembly bill that will bring human trafficking education into schools across the state, Humboldt County officials are working to launch a similar project possibly as soon as next month.

The Human Trafficking Prevention Education and Training Act, AB 1227, which was signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown in October 2017, makes California the first state in the nation to adopt education and training for educators and students to prevent human trafficking.

“Once again, California is first in the nation, this time when it comes to implementing education in our schools to prevent human trafficking,” Becerra said in a statement Wednesday. “We owe many thanks to the civic and community leaders who made this day possible. Here in California, we take the fight against human trafficking seriously. We know that education is key to keep our children out of the reach of labor or sex traffickers.”

First District Supervisor Rex Bohn said it’s a critical lesson for local students. He is helping to implement a program called PROTECT (Prevention Organized to Educate Children on Trafficking), which received a \$400,000 boost in funding from the Rural County Representatives of California, of which Bohn is chairman.

“We’re going to roll it out in Humboldt County next,” Bohn said. “It is a huge issue in rural California and especially in our area. People don’t really believe it’s here until you start showing them the evidence it’s here.”

Bohn said the Humboldt County Office of Education and the Sheriff’s Office would be leaders in helping to implement the program.

A spokeswoman for the sheriff’s office said there was little information she could provide about the implementation of the program at this time.

Jenny Bowen, a spokeswoman for the office of education, said Superintendent Chris Hartley was “committed to the effort.”

“We are certainly committed to being at the table and whatever is needed to help it be successful,” she said.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson has previously called schools a “prime hunting ground” for traffickers and the National Human Trafficking Hotline states California has the highest number of human trafficking cases reported in the nation.

The PROTECT program will be implemented locally to students in fifth, seventh, ninth and 11th grades.

According to PROTECT’s regional director Amanda Taggart, the instruction will be tailored to the mindset of students in each of the targeted grade levels.

“In fifth grade, we cover safe places and safe people. ... We don’t say sex or slavery or human trafficking,” she explained. “We want to address online safety and safety around other people.”

Seventh-graders learn about self-worth and receive an introduction to human trafficking while ninth-graders take an in-depth look at human trafficking.

Eleventh-graders learn about “linking historical and modern-day slavery,” Taggart said. “It gears the students into thinking of ways they can give back to their community.”

Colby Smart, the coordinator of learning support services at the Humboldt Educational Resource Center said the curriculum is being reviewed.

“We’re very much in the beginning stage of this review,” he said.

But Bohn said the program could begin locally as soon as next month. It is set to be part of the 2017-18 school year, he said.

Bohn added the Humboldt County Growers Alliance was invited to be part of the planning process because of the suggestion the cannabis industry and the trafficking industries are connected.

“We have not seen any of this in our regulated industry,” Bohn said. “There is no doubt it is taking place in the noncompliant industry and the trespass grows. ... There is too much rhetoric to deny it.”

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