



January 4, 2024

Honorable Shad White
Mississippi State Auditor
Post Office Box 956
Jackson, Mississippi 39205-0956

Re: Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund – FY 2023

Dear Auditor White,

House Bill 1559, enacted on July 8, 2020, established the “Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund” to be administered by the Attorney General’s Office under the coordination of a seven-person committee with appointments from the Speaker of the House, Lieutenant Governor, Governor, and others. The bill provided that the Fund shall consist of:

- (a) Monies appropriated by the Legislature;
- (b) The interest accruing to the fund;
- (c) Monies received under the provisions of Section 99-19-75;
- (d) Monies received from the federal government;
- (e) Donations to the fund;
- (f) Assessments collected pursuant to Section 83-39-31;
- (g) All other monies received by the state from every source for the support of shelters for victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation; and
- (h) Monies received from such other sources as may be provided by law.

Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.11(1). The bill further provided that these monies should be used to fund and assist human trafficking shelters, commercial sexual exploitation shelters and victim service providers.” Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.11(2). Pursuant to the administrative rules promulgated under Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.10, a 3-person independent evaluation panel of experts in the field of human trafficking was empaneled by the Fund Committee to evaluate the funding applications.

The law requires the Attorney General’s Office to “provide an itemized financial report to the Legislature and State Auditor of all expenditures, statistical data regarding services that have been provided, and a report of all service activity with geographical description.” Miss. Code Ann. § 97-3-54.11(4). This is our third such report.

Fund Summary for FY 2023

Funds Received

At the close of Fiscal Year 2023 (June 30, 2023), the balance of the “Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund” was \$322,721.72. The Fund consisted of monies derived from the following sources:

- (a) \$2.5 million appropriated by the Mississippi Legislature during the 2022 legislative session.
- (b) \$12,342.70 in interest earned.
- (c) \$263,278.39 in assessments paid to the Fund by criminal defendants and sent to the Fund by Mississippi’s court clerks pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 99-19-75(2).
- (d) \$200.00 in donations to the fund from River of Pearls chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

The fiscal year covered by this report is the first to show a significant accumulation of the criminal assessments required by the law. This office has made a concerted effort since the law’s passage to provide clarification and information to court clerks, judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement on this provision as it has generated considerable concern and confusion.

Funds Distributed

In November 2022, the Attorney General’s Office opened the first application period for human trafficking shelters, commercial sexual exploitation shelters and victim service providers to seek funding. As a result, the Attorney General’s Office awarded \$2,472,950.00 to providers who serve victims throughout the state. Funds were distributed in early February 2023. A detailed breakdown of the awards is provided *infra*.

As noted above, a 3-person independent evaluation panel was empaneled by the Fund Committee to evaluate the funding applications. Each panelist was compensated \$1,000 for their time. One panelist refused the payment, therefore only \$2,000 was distributed from the Fund for that purpose. While the law permits the Attorney General’s Office to use up to \$100,000.00 per fiscal year for administrative purposes, these were the only distributions made for the administration of the Fund.

In December 2022, the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund Evaluation Review Panel recommended approval of \$2,472,950.00 to victim service providers that applied during this first application period.

FY 2023 Fund Awards and Victims Served

Of the 14 applications received, 2 were disqualified as non-responsive, 9 were funded and the panel declined to fund 3. Of the 9 proposals that were funded, 3 were partially funded. All awardees must enter into an MOU with the Attorney General’s Office, which includes a requirement for quarterly reports to the Fund Committee.

A summary of the FY 2023 awards and information regarding victims served with the funding through September 30, 2023 is outlined below:

- 1) Canopy Children's Solutions (Canopy) received \$128,197.00 for intensive human trafficking identification training, including EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) training, for 13 clinicians who provide services statewide. As of September 30, 2023, Canopy had provided 16 minors/children clients with therapeutic services learned from the EMDR training.
- 2) Center for Violence Prevention (CVP) was awarded \$516,890.00 for salaries for 3 new rapid response advocates and an attorney to specifically serve human trafficking victims. The funding also includes partial salaries for 2 existing rapid response advocates and security and technology for the Tower shelter building. As of September 30, 2023, CVP had served 240 victims from 34 counties including Adams, Alcorn, Amite, Desoto, Forrest, Grenada, Harrison, Hinds, Humphreys, Jackson, Jones, Lafayette, Lamar, Lauderdale, Lee, Leflore, Lowndes, Madison, Marion, Monroe, Oktibbeha, Panola, Pearl River, Pike, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Rankin, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tate, Tippah, Union, Washington and Webster counties. During this time, CVP served 161 adult victims and 64 minor victims, with another 19 victims' ages unknown. Of the victims served, 271 were female, 8 were male, 11 were transgender and 5 victims' gender identity were unknown. Services provided included shelter, on-site crisis response, case management, advocacy, medical and mental health referrals, emergency financial assistance and legal services.
- 3) Christians in Action (CIA) was awarded \$83,000.00 for 100% of a new clinical social worker's salary, 25% of the salary of a case manager and for staff training to provide services to victims of human trafficking. As of September 30, 2023, CIA had the case manager, but reported having difficulty finding a qualified candidate for the clinical social worker position. CIA is the Child Advocacy Center serving Hinds County and reported serving 5 female minor children in shelter and providing forensic interviews for an additional 6 minor females during the reporting period.
- 4) Gulf Coast Center for Nonviolence (GCCFN) was awarded \$107,063.00 to hire a part-time HT counselor, expand case management and for supplies to serve HT victims at their existing shelter. As of September 30, 2023, GCCFN had served 85 adult female victims in the six southernmost counties of the state: Jackson, Harrison, Hancock, Pearl River, George and Stone. Services provided include emergency housing, transitional housing, case management, emergency financial assistance, individual and group counseling, and recreational activities.
- 5) Methodist Children's Homes was awarded \$800,000.00 to develop transitional housing training and life skill/workforce training for older children in their care. Methodist Children's Homes (Methodist) is based in Jackson but serves minors from around the state. As of September 30, 2023, Methodist had served 32 new clients who were either trafficked or at risk of trafficking. Of the 32 new clients served, 12 were male and 19 were female. Services provided include individual and group therapy, intervention and prevention programs, psychiatric and human trafficking assessments, independent living preparation, educational services, campus activities, nutritional meals, safety planning, therapeutic residential planning, crisis response and the establishment of calming spaces for residents.

6) Mississippians Against Human Trafficking (MAHT) was awarded \$120,000.00 for an independent living assistance program to provide financial assistance to former victims and those at risk of victimization of human trafficking to be used towards independent living to prevent future victimization, as well as partial salary funding for a full-time Executive Director. As of September 30, 2023, MAHT had hired its Executive Director's salary distributed funds for independent living expenses for 12 adult clients residing in Desoto, Forrest, Harrison, Hinds, Jackson, Lee, Rankin and Winston counties. Living expenses provided include rental and utility assistance, rental and utility deposits, auto repair and groceries.

7) Mississippi Families for Kids (MFFK) was awarded \$40,000.00 for training in trauma-informed/evidence based therapeutic treatment modalities and towards the salary of the clinical director for grant management duties. As of September 30, 2023, MFFK had participated in human trafficking identification training at Florida State University, as well as more in-depth training with Iron Sharpens Iron. MFFK reports that the training did not occur until the 3rd quarter and therefore, the agency had not been able to serve any victims during the reporting periods.

8) Southern Christian Services (SCYCY) was awarded \$650,000.00 to operate a female children's human trafficking shelter housed on property managed by Sunnybrook. As of September 30, 2023, SCYCY had developed the program from scratch, begun hiring and training all new staff, and by June 2023 began serving children. SCYCY has served 13 female youths since opening in June 2023. SCS accepts children from the entire state, but during this period, SCYCY served children from Forrest, Hancock, Harrison, Hinds, Jackson, Lee, Rankin and Washington counties. Services provided include shelter, therapeutic counseling, emergency services, crisis intervention/response, victim advocacy, medical exams, medication management, life skills training, educational and recreational activities.

9) Sunnybrook Children's Home was awarded \$27,800.00 to fund facility and grounds maintenance for the above Southern Christian Services project. As of September 30, 2023, Sunnybrook had utilized funds for insurance expenses as well as septic and HVAC repair expenses.

Pursuant to the law and the administrative rules, any funds not expended during the 12-month period of the initial MOU may be rolled over into the next year, with a new MOU and continued quarterly funding reports.

FY 2024 Funding

The Legislature appropriated another \$2.5 million to the Fund during the 2023 legislative session. In anticipation of distributing these funds, the Committee released a second application for funding on September 18, 2023, and applications were due October 30, 2023. Those funds have not yet been received.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Anna Ward of my office,
at anna.ward@ago.ms.gov or 769-234-0881.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lynn Fitch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lynn" and last name "Fitch" clearly distinguishable.

Lynn Fitch
Attorney General
State of Mississippi