



*Lynn Fitch*  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

January 3, 2025

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

Re: Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund –  
FY 2024

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 is empaneled by the Fund Committee to evaluate the funding applications and make funding recommendations to the Committee.

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 2024**

### Fund Status

At the close of Fiscal Year 2024 (June 30, 2024), the balance of the “Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund” was \$1,398,952.26. This sum included \$912,030.38 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) and \$36,926.45 in earned interest.

### Funds Distributed

In September 2023, the Attorney General’s Office opened the second application period for human trafficking shelters, commercial sexual exploitation shelters and victim service providers to seek funding. Thirteen applications were received, seeking a total of \$3,191,378 in funding. Of that total, 2 were disqualified for failure to meet application requirements, 9 were funded, and 2 were not funded. Of the 9 proposals that were funded, 3 were partially funded. Awards were announced in January 2024, and in this second round of funding, the Attorney General’s Office distributed \$2,130,821.05. 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 declined 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.

## **FY 2024 Fund Awards and Victims Served**

Pursuant to the administrative rules for the Fund, all awardees must enter an MOU with the Attorney General’s Office, which includes a requirement for quarterly reports to the Fund Committee. A summary of the FY 2024 awards and information regarding victims served with the funding, pursuant to their September 30, 2024, reports, is outlined below:

- 1) Center for Violence Prevention (CVP) was awarded \$813,575 for rapid responder services, legal services and victim advocacy services. This total also includes \$100,000 towards a construction project for the Tower. As of September 30, 2024, CVP had served 235 victims from 42 counties including Adams, Alcorn, Amite, Attala, Bolivar, Chickasaw, Clarke, Clay, Coahoma, Covington, DeSoto, Forrest, Hinds, Humphreys,

Itawamba, Jackson, Jasper, Jones, Kemper, Lafayette, Lamar, Lauderdale, Leake, Lee, Leflore, Lincoln, Lowndes, Madison, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Neshoba, Newton, Oktibbeha, Pearl River, Pontotoc, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, Smith, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Warren and Washington counties. During this time, CVP served 166 adult victims and 63 minor victims, with another 6 victims' ages unknown. Services provided included shelter, on-site crisis response, case management, advocacy, medical and mental health referrals, emergency financial assistance and legal services.

2) Domestic Abuse Family Shelter (DAFS) was awarded \$93,433.70 for victim advocacy and shelter services for human trafficking survivors at their shelters in Laurel and Hattiesburg. Of that amount, \$15,000 of the award is for an external evaluation of their ongoing human trafficking program to identify ways to enhance their current services. As of September 30, 2024, DAFS served 34 victims. Services include emergency shelter, case management, emergency financial assistance, individual and group counseling, transportation and other activities.

3) El Pueblo was awarded \$93,472.35 to expand existing legal services to specifically serve victims of both sex and labor trafficking in Central and South Mississippi. As of September 30, 2024, El Pueblo served at least 21 victims. Services include legal support, trafficking screenings, mental and physical health consultations, support for investigations by law enforcement, group counseling, and outreach activities.

4) Gulf Coast Center for Nonviolence (GCCFN) was awarded \$146,446.00, including partial salaries for employees that serve human trafficking victims. Funds have also been used for case management and supplies to serve human trafficking victims at their existing shelters in Biloxi and Pascagoula. As of September 30, 2024, GCCFN had served 100 victims. Services include emergency housing, transitional housing, case management, emergency financial assistance, individual and group counseling, transportation, and other activities.

5) Hope Village was awarded \$321,722.00 to establish a shelter for minor victims of human trafficking through renovation of an existing building to specifically meet the needs of minor human trafficking victims. The award will also fund the full salary of a Program Director for the human trafficking program and partial salary of a full-time therapist. As of September 30, 2024, Hope Village served 79 children. Services include individual advocacy, crisis intervention, independent living skills, individual counseling, education/school intervention, family team meetings, transportation, and health/medical referrals.

6) Mississippi Coalition Against Human Trafficking (MCAHT) was awarded \$129,500.00 for an independent living assistance (ILA) program to provide financial assistance to former victims and those at risk of victimization to enable independent living and prevent future victimization. A portion of the funds was used for the

development and implementation of an ILA application web portal. As of September 30, 2024, MCAHT had distributed funds for independent living expenses for 61 adults residing in Alcorn, DeSoto, Forrest, Harrison, Hinds, Jefferson, Lamar, Lawrence, Lee, and Tippah counties. Living expenses include utilities, rentals, auto repair, hygiene assistance, and groceries.

7) Natchez Children's Advocacy Center (Natchez CAC) was awarded \$12,594 for staff members and members of their local multidisciplinary teams to attend training specific to the care of human trafficking victims. As of September 30, 2024, Natchez CAC has served eight child victims. Services include forensic interviews and medical exam referrals.

8) Southern Christian Services (SCSCY) was awarded \$492,278 for their children's human trafficking shelter housed on property managed by Sunnybrook. As of September 30, 2024, SCSCY has served 31 youth victims. SCSCY accepts children from the entire state, but during this period, SCSCY served children from Adams, Forrest, Hancock, Hinds, Leflore, Jackson, Lexington, Itawamba, and Panola counties. Services 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 continue providing facility and grounds maintenance for the above Southern Christian Services shelter. As of September 30, 2024, Sunnybrook had utilized funds for insurance expenses as well as septic, HVAC, and entrance gate 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 2025 Funding**

The Legislature appropriated \$2,500,000 for distribution in Fiscal Year 2025, though those funds have not yet been received by this office. The third application period opened on November 18, 2024, and closed on December 13, 2024. A total of 17 applications were received, totaling \$6,849,388.94 in funding requests. The evaluation panel met on January 2, 2025, and its recommendations for funding will be presented to the Committee later this month so awards may be made as soon as the appropriated funds are transferred by DFA.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Abby Overby of my office, at [abby.overby@ago.ms.gov](mailto:abby.overby@ago.ms.gov) or 601-359-3094.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn Fitch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative initial "L".

Lynn Fitch  
Attorney General  
State of Mississippi