



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairman Bill Foster (D-IL)
of the Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

Joint Research & Technology and Investigations & Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:
The Role of Technology in Countering Trafficking in Persons

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

Good morning, and welcome to today's remote hearing entitled "The Role of Technology in Countering Trafficking in Persons." This is a joint Subcommittee hearing between the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee and the Research and Technology Subcommittee, and I'm so pleased to welcome Chairwoman Stevens and Ranking Members Norman and Baird, as well as all of our colleagues. As we prepare to mark the annual World Day Against Trafficking in Persons on July 30, I can think of no better time to shine a light on the tragic persistence of human trafficking and explore the new technologies that will assist our efforts to defeat this scourge once and for all. Trafficking in persons is a complex problem, in the United States and around the world. We need to develop better tools to disrupt criminal networks, bring the perpetrators to justice, and support the victims of human trafficking. This hearing is an opportunity to learn about new research and novel technologies, and to consider how America can better integrate those assets into the fight against human trafficking.

Let's be clear — technology is frequently misused to facilitate trafficking in persons. It provides new opportunities for traffickers to target potential victims, conduct anonymous and illicit financial transactions, and expand their criminal markets. Yet despite its obvious challenges, technology is also an important asset for those involved in combatting trafficking in persons. Its positive use can aid investigations, enhance prosecutions, raise awareness, provide services to victims, and shed new light on how trafficking networks operate. With this in mind, our ability to counter trafficking in persons largely depends on how we harness technology in our efforts.

We know that there is a lot of good work happening to combat human trafficking, but there also seems to be a lot of opportunity to elevate the role of the Federal research and development enterprise and increase collaboration between the agencies. The National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate, the Department of Transportation R&D programs, and others can all contribute to the goals of prevention and disruption of this crime.

We have at our disposal a wide range of tools that could be used to support anti-trafficking efforts, including through artificial intelligence and machine learning. For example, AI can help

make predictions, recommendations, or decisions to identify financial transactions that may be indicative of human trafficking networks. I'm looking forward to hearing from today's panel of witnesses because they bring real-world experience to the table, and can recommend ways that we on the Science Committee can support efforts to meet challenges with cutting-edge technology.

This hearing is a great opportunity to think outside the box when it comes to research and technology that can address the many causes and consequences of human trafficking. The more obvious examples are technologies that can aid law enforcement in identifying potential perpetrators and victims. Beyond that, there are analysis tools that can comb through the dark web for illicit transactions; blockchain can help companies track their supply chains and identify vulnerabilities that increase the risk of human trafficking; and there's an acute need for social science research to assess the medical, emotional, and material needs of victims and ensure they are connected to resources that can help them as they reenter society.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today. Your expertise will be invaluable as we consider how the Science Committee's oversight and legislative powers can help in the fight against human trafficking.