



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Illinois Hotel Workers Receive Virtual Training to Help End Human Trafficking

Through a New Partnership with BEST, Hotel Staffs Will Learn How to Identify and Respond to Human Trafficking Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

CHICAGO – The Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association (IHLA) has announced a new partnership with Seattle-based nonprofit, Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) to offer virtual training for hotel workers on how to identify and assist human trafficking victims. This partnership comes as a new state law goes into effect on June 1, which requires that all Illinois hotel employees take human trafficking awareness training, an initiative supported by IHLA.

Human trafficking can occur in any community, and it is often carried out using legitimate businesses, including hotels. Even as hotels see record low occupancy rates due to COVID-19, the current conditions of the pandemic are making it easier for traffickers to find and groom victims. Many children are isolated, and their lives have moved even more online. In addition, the current economy is creating financial vulnerability for many people. This is creating an environment where traffickers can recruit new victims. Now more than ever, it is essential that hotel employees are trained in what to look for, so they can recognize and report the warning signs of human trafficking.

“Hotel employees can make a difference in the life of someone who is being trafficked,” **said Mar Brettmann, CEO of BEST.** “As hotels adapt to social distancing guidelines, it’s important that employees know how to be observant of the warning signs of human trafficking. That is why BEST is pleased to partner with IHLA, so we can educate their member’s employees to help them know when to report certain behaviors that can indicate human trafficking.”

Inhospitable to Human Trafficking training for hotel employees is a 30-minute, video-based training available in both English and Spanish. The training explains the different types of trafficking, the risk hotels face due to trafficking, both for their guests and staff, as well as the signs of trafficking and how to alert authorities without putting the victim at risk. Researchers from the University of Washington evaluated BEST's hotel training and found that trained employees were more likely to come forward to report human trafficking incidents to their managers and 96 percent of hotel employee participants believe that BEST's training made their hotel safer.

“Hotels are meant to serve as a place of comfort and safety for guests, however, traffickers have taken advantage of this business model to exploit individuals through human trafficking. We are proud to support the new state law that requires all hotels throughout Illinois to provide training to their staff, which can be completed through our partnership with BEST,” **said Michael Jacobson, president & CEO, IHLA.** “Through hotel workers learning how to identify and act when faced with human trafficking, and working with law enforcement, we can help put an end to human trafficking, support victims and bring traffickers to justice.”

Earlier this year, IHLA partnered with the American Hotel & Lodging Association and the Asian American Hotel Owners Association to host the “No Room for Trafficking” training event. This national effort included education and awareness initiatives to increase knowledge about trafficking among hotel employees, guests and the public.

“We applaud the steps the hotel industry is taking to protect the wellbeing of guests and employees by proactively seeking out training initiatives, even during an ongoing public health crisis. Further, we commend BEST for providing a useful tool that can be utilized remotely. Now more than ever, we need to ensure these trainings are in place to protect vulnerable individuals within our state,” **said State Rep. Terra Costa Howard (D-Lombard), chief sponsor of the training legislation**

ABOUT THE ILLINOIS HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION

The Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association (IHLA) serves as the essential resource and unified voice for advancing the lodging industry across Illinois. Consisting of more than 500 hotels and their employees throughout the state, IHLA advocates the industry's position on political, legislative, and regulatory issues that have the potential to impact the success of Illinois hotels. For more information, visit <http://www.illinoishotels.org/>.

ABOUT BUSINESSES ENDING SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING (BEST)

Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) is a Seattle-based nonprofit organization with the mission to align and equip leaders to use the power of business to prevent human trafficking. BEST is the first organization in the country dedicated entirely to working with businesses to disrupt human trafficking. BEST has provided consultation and training to hundreds of businesses on how to prevent human trafficking. For more information visit bestalliance.org.

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