

# NEWS

---

Dec. 4, 2025

For Immediate Release

## Shining a Light on Human Trafficking Before and After the World Arrives

**SAN MATEO** — Local, state and federal agencies will gather next week in San Mateo to develop a coordinated strategy to detect and prevent human trafficking, an effort officials say is essential as the region prepares for the Super Bowl and World Cup in 2026.

“Ignore human trafficking and you have a guarantee that we’ll have an explosion of it,” San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said. “But by preparing for it, we can substantially prevent it or shut it down, because presence — turning the light on — always is the best way to stop it.”

With three international airports close by and hotels and motels lining Highway 101 and other busy corridors, officials say the Peninsula’s geography gives traffickers the mobility and cover they need to operate without being noticed. While the public focus now is on major sporting events, officials say the goal is to build a permanent framework to detect and interrupt both sex and labor trafficking — one that will remain long after the crowds for Super Bowl LX and six FIFA World Cup matches depart.

They say the threat falls hardest on those with the fewest resources or support networks.

“Human trafficking is one of the most underreported crimes we deal with,” said Mike Sena, executive director of the

[Northern California Regional Intelligence Center](#), which gathers and analyzes threat information for law enforcement agencies. “Traffickers prey on the most vulnerable people in our communities — young people, immigrants, individuals struggling with addiction — and they rely on that invisibility. When victims can’t speak freely or safely, these crimes stay hidden.”

The Dec. 8 event will bring those concerns into sharper focus. County and federal officials, victim-advocacy groups and law enforcement agencies from across the region will gather to outline the early-warning signs of trafficking, share data and coordinate their response.

“Human trafficking thrives in silence. As elected officials and stakeholders, we have to speak up for victims who don’t dare to seek help,” said San Mateo County Supervisor Jackie Speier, who is hosting the Dec. 8 convening in partnership with Supervisor Ray Mueller. “It will require an all-encompassing, ongoing community action plan to prevent this heinous crime.”

“This can’t be an on-again, off-again effort tied to major events,” Mueller said. “We’re building the infrastructure to spot patterns, support victims and share information across agencies year-round.”

The convening — which includes the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the FBI, San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office and numerous other state, federal and local agencies — is designed to prepare the sectors that most often encounter victims but may not recognize the signs of exploitation. A key goal is to develop training so health care workers, transportation agencies and hotel and motel staff can spot the warning signs of trafficking and know where to turn for assistance.

Under state and federal law, human trafficking encompasses forced labor, forced commercial sex, and any commercial sexual exploitation of children.

While sex trafficking often draws national attention, recent cases in San Mateo County have involved labor exploitation: a nanny allegedly held in forced servitude inside a Hillsborough home; farmworkers housed in unsafe, overcrowded conditions; and restaurant workers who reported being underpaid, threatened or restricted in their movement.

Researchers have long discussed whether major events like the Super Bowl drive spikes in trafficking, and several national studies have found little consistent evidence of event-related surges. But local officials say any debate overlooks the real issue: protecting the people most at risk.

The combination of large crowds, busy travel corridors and crimes that rarely occur in public view makes early preparation essential, regardless of whether the numbers show a spike. Sena said the urgency is clear: trafficking doesn’t operate in isolation. The money it generates often feeds other criminal networks, including the drug trade.

“Our responsibility,” Speier said, “is to the people who are most at risk, not to the event calendar.”

**Media Contact:**

Marshall Wilson, Communications Officer, 650-465-7289, [mwilson@smcgov.org](mailto:mwilson@smcgov.org)

