



A Window into the Hampton Roads Human Trafficking Task Force

U.S. V. MAGNOLIA CLEANING SERVICES

The Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking

is a U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) grant-funded program that brings together key partners to develop, expand, or strengthen multidisciplinary task forces to address human trafficking. With this approach, local, state, or tribal service providers; law enforcement; prosecutors; and other collaborators can:

- Increase identification of victims of trafficking,
- Access a comprehensive array of service options, and
- Seek justice for victims by implementing victim-centered and trauma-informed investigations and prosecutions.

THE WINDOWS SERIES



Foundations Edition



Case Spotlight Edition



Disciplines Edition

INTRODUCTION

The **Windows Series** offers insights into the ECM model and task forces with examples from the efforts of ECMs nationwide. These examples showcase different structures, successes, innovations, and ideas that:

- demonstrate a commitment to addressing serious crime and supporting victims and survivors;
- illustrate the spectrum of activities and approaches employed by the ECMs;
- share successful strategies to encourage stakeholder cooperation;
- enhance public awareness by highlighting the nature and scope of work;
- offer a behind-the-scenes look at the field and its day-to-day work to a wider audience.

The **Case Spotlight Edition** features cases investigated by ECMs, highlighting the range of scenarios as well as the different methods, partnerships and collaborative efforts that go into increasing identification of victims of all ages and of all forms of human trafficking; providing access to services; and conducting victim-centered and trauma-informed investigations to prosecute traffickers.

LABOR TRAFFICKING IN COMMERCIAL LAUNDRY



This case spotlight highlights the work of the Hampton Roads Human Trafficking Task Force in 'U.S. v. Magnolia Cleaning Services'.

United States v. Magnolia Cleaning Services



TASK FORCE | The Hampton Roads Human Trafficking Task Force

VICTIMS | 6 (4 female, 2 male)

PERPETRATORS | 4



TRAFFICKING | Labor through force & coercion (debt bondage)

PRIMARY CHARGE | Forced labor (18 USC § 1589)

SENTENCE | 4 years, 9 months

SNAPSHOT | With the support and resources of the Enhanced Collaborative Model, the Hampton Roads Human Trafficking Task Force successfully dismantled a labor trafficking operation run by Magnolia Cleaning Services in Williamsburg, Virginia. In January 2023, four perpetrators were sentenced for their role in the scheme “where children were forced to work long hours in inhospitable conditions”. (HSI ASAC Norfolk, Jim Stitzel). This sentencing represented the culmination of a months-long effort by the Task Force, and the case demonstrates the impact of a truly collaborative response involving law enforcement, victim services, prosecutors, and community stakeholders.

Background

In 2016, the Hampton Roads Region of Virginia received DOJ/OVC funding to create an Enhanced Collaborative Model Human Trafficking Task Force (ECM). Comprised of partners including the Attorney General’s Office, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Transitions Family Violence Services and Samaritan House, and regional police departments and prosecutors, the Hampton Roads Human Trafficking Task Force (HRHTTF) has used federal funds to define roles and responsibilities, develop and implement protocols and, crucially, investigate cases and provide services to victims.

Magnolia Cleaning Services (“Magnolia”) was a commercial laundry business in Williamsburg, VA. The majority of the business’ workforce were undocumented non-citizens, some of whom resided at the business, or a residence owned by management.

Case Summary

In 2021, HRHTTF received a tip from the public about a possible labor trafficking situation at Magnolia. The business employed mostly undocumented, non-citizen workers—some of whom lived on-site. Investigators quickly identified a young woman and her child as potential victims. Within weeks, a second referral uncovered a minor who had been smuggled from El Salvador and subjected to excessive work hours, physical abuse, and social isolation.

A broader investigation—led by HSI Norfolk and supported by Virginia State Police, revealed that the business’s owner and associates smuggled multiple Salvadoran nationals into the U.S., imposed \$12,000 “debts” to control them, and threatened physical harm and deportation to maintain compliance.

In December 2022, a federal grand jury indicted four defendants. They were arrested in a coordinated, multi-day enforcement operation. All four ultimately pled guilty or were convicted; sentencing occurred in early 2023.

Thank you to task force members of the Hampton Roads Human Trafficking Task Force for contributing case details, insights and lessons learned.

COLLABORATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Law Enforcement

- HSI Norfolk spearheaded the investigation, conducting surveillance, coordinating search warrants, and leading the enforcement operation.
- Virginia State Police, DOL-OIG, and SSA-OIG provided investigative and logistical support, including fraud and identity document tracing.

Victim Services

- Victim Assistance Specialist from HSI leveraged longstanding relationships with service provider partners to ensure timely connection and access to support for victims.
- Service provider partners provided immediate shelter, safety planning, and trauma-informed care.

- Pro bono attorneys helped secure Continued Presence and initiated T-visa applications for victims.

Prosecution

- U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia built a strong case using evidence from search warrants, victim statements, and interagency coordination.
- Prosecutors emphasized victim protection, trauma-informed interviews, and minimizing retraumatization during judicial proceedings.

Victim-Centered Response

The HRHTTF coordinated individualized services for all six identified victims, including:

- Safe housing
- Education and schooling for minors
- Employment access and vocational referrals
- Mental health counseling
- Legal advocacy and immigration relief
- Transportation to court and service appointments

Additionally, the identified victims were issued restitution. Funds were also issued to a service provider for the housing support they offered to victims, setting precedent for this type of restitution. The total amount was \$205,000, supporting financial stabilization.

THE ECM – WHAT MADE THIS COLLABORATION EFFECTIVE

Embedded Partnerships: Roles were clearly defined ahead of time and a history of working together allowed for quick and efficient mobilization and response.

Relationships and Mutual Trust: Victims were identified both through law enforcement tips and referrals from service providers—demonstrating trust and the importance of developing relationships across disciplines and with the community.

Holistic Victim Approach: Both law enforcement and victim services prioritize the safety and stability of victims, with decisions guided by the needs of victims, not case expediency.

Prosecution: A successful prosecution held traffickers accountable and ordered restitution for the victims.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Collaboration is critical for moving complex labor trafficking cases forward.
- Service providers are not peripheral — they are critical in identifying victims and keeping them safe.
- Taking the time to develop protocols and engage in cross-agency planning well before responding to cases pays off in faster, more coordinated enforcement and support.

REFERENCES

US Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia. (2023, January 21). Williamsburg Business Owner Pleads Guilty to Money Laundering and Conspiracy Involving Labor Trafficking [Press release]. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edva/pr/williamsburg-business-owner-pleads-guilty-money-laundering-and-conspiracy-involving>