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March 31, 2022: District Attorney Gascón Unveils Human Trafficking Diversion Program

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Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón was joined today by Public Defender Ricardo Garcia, Alternate Public Defender Erika Anzoategui and others to announce a diversion program for human trafficking victims that aims to improve and restore their lives through a comprehensive set of services.

"Many human trafficking victims feel trapped, helpless and isolated with no one to trust and nowhere to turn," District Attorney Gascón said. "Through this program, victims will receive healing, restoration and rehabilitation rather than retribution that has existed for far too long in our criminal justice system." "Victims of human trafficking need our support. The Public Defender Office is excited to participate in Los Angeles County Superior Court's first Human Trafficking Diversion Court," Public Defender Garcia said. "This innovative new court has been developed to bring services to human and labor trafficking victims, often Public Defender clients. These victims will receive specialized trauma-based care, individual and group counseling for alcohol and substance abuse, mental health treatment, job training, career opportunities, educational and financial planning, resume services and criminal record clearing. This new Diversion Court understands the unique challenges these victims face and provides an opportunity and tools for a fresh start."

"The Alternate Public Defender's Office is proud to be part of this collaborative effort that will employ a culturally sensitive, multi-disciplinary approach to address the needs of human trafficking survivors," Alternate Public Defender Anzoategui said. "We are thrilled that the justice system is finally focusing on treatment and care for this vulnerable population instead of jail."

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) that was recently signed is a collaborative effort that will clear the criminal record of human trafficking victims that often serves as a barrier to employment, housing and recovery.

Those who are currently or have been identified as human trafficking victims and have any misdemeanor or non-serious, non-violent felony are eligible. Once eligible, participants will be referred from any defense attorney, prosecutor or local law enforcement agencies.

A judge will approve the suitability for each participant who will then be assigned to a community-based organization for treatment.

All participants will receive a host of services, including individual and group counseling, substance abuse and mental health treatment and opportunities for continuing their education.

After someone completes the diversionary program, a judge can dismiss and vacate the person's arrest, convictions and probation violations.

The program will be launched at the Pomona courthouse with the hope that it will be implemented in other parts of Los Angeles County plagued by human trafficking.

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