AMWA-PATH (Physicians Against the Trafficking of Humans) wants to commend the 117th Congress for passing the Counter Human Trafficking Act of 2021 which among other things establishes a Department of Homeland Security Center for Countering Human Trafficking. This center will serve to unify global efforts to counter human trafficking through law enforcement operations and victim protection, prevention and awareness programs. The focus on an evidence-based, survivor-centered approach in training, identification and screening efforts is so critical to anti-trafficking efforts. The law which was signed on December 27, 2022 also requires that criminal justice efforts must increase the focus on labor trafficking situations and that corporations are expected to eradicate forced labor from their supply chains. In addition, the Center will have a Protection and Awareness Programs Unit which will operate the national Blue Campaign to raise public awareness on trafficking. Congress appropriated funding of $14,000,000 to carry out the various goals of this Act. Creating a dedicated, focused federal office with an appointed director and staff focused on increased intervention is a good first step in the recognition of human trafficking as a serious human rights violation.

We also want to recognize the Justice Department for providing over $90 million in grant funds, with over 500 awards given to organizations that provide services to survivors, support research and evaluate responses to human trafficking. $32.6 million was awarded to programs that provide services to survivors. $21.6 million was awarded to develop, expand or strengthen multidisciplinary anti-trafficking task forces. $16.4 million was awarded to provide housing assistance funds, as housing insecurity is a big risk factor for initial exploitation and inability to extricate from harmful trafficking situations for many survivors. $3.1 million was awarded to assist the Office for Victims of Crime to provide training and technical assistance and develop tools and resources for anti-trafficking stakeholders, including collaboration with the Office on Trafficking in Persons at the Department of Health and Human Services to develop anti-trafficking standards of care for service providers.

We urge additional federal focus and efforts on providing funding, resources and training for all health care workers through the Office on Trafficking in Persons in the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. Health care professionals are in a unique position to interact with potential victims prior to and during their exploitation and can better recognize and intervene early when trained on risk factors and indicators for human trafficking. Health care professionals, working through a preventative public health lens, can become a real force in anti-trafficking efforts by identifying vulnerability factors (for example, housing & food instability, history of family or intimate partner violence, substance use disorders) in our patients before exploitation and providing access to stabilizing interventions to those most at risk. The physician and student leaders at AMWA-PATH have developed a comprehensive training “Learn to Identify and Fight Trafficking” (LIFT) directed to health care professionals. LIFT is a free 3 hour CME- accredited training taught by our volunteer physician leaders and survivors, that focuses on the identification and treatment of survivors of human trafficking in a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, patient-centered manner.

If you would like to learn more, join our leadership team of volunteer medical students and physicians, arrange a training or donate to help fund our anti-trafficking efforts in education, advocacy, education and research, please visit www.amwa-doc.org/our-work/initiatives/human-trafficking.

Thanks!