



Primer: The Obama and Biden Administrations' Hijacking of Human Trafficking Directives with DEI Ideology

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Synopsis

The Obama and Biden administrations' anti-human trafficking framework treated trafficking not as a criminal enterprise to be destroyed but as a social equity problem to be managed through expensive victim services, non-government organization (NGO) partnerships, and "undeserved community" messaging. President Joe Biden made the implicit Obama-era trajectory more explicit: His White House described trafficking as disproportionately affecting "vulnerable and underserved" populations, tied the plan to "gender and racial equity," and linked trafficking to "marginalized groups." These initiatives gave taxpayer money to independent and apolitical groups pushing radical ideology under the guise of being "anti-trafficking" or "victim-oriented." In practice, these organizations create no proper solutions and instead fuel a crisis at the border. By combating these groups and their policy objectives, wasteful spending can be removed, and lawmakers can focus on responding to the real crises. President Donald Trump in his second term has made great strides in dismantling this worldview; a January 2025 executive order terminated agency diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) mandates; equity action plans; equity-related grants and contracts; and DEI performance requirements, and he has put in great effort into shrinking the bloated bureaucracy that has entrenched itself in Washington in the name of "anti-trafficking" efforts.¹ The problem is serious and symptomatic of the larger leftist NGO ecosystem, and the solution must be decisive and target the underlying statutes that have allowed this framework to persist.

¹ Exec. Order No. 14151, 90 Fed. Reg. 8339 (Jan. 29, 2025), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>; Exec. Order No. 14238, 90 Fed. Reg. 13,043 (Mar. 20, 2025), available at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-14238-continuing-the-reduction-the-federal-bureaucracy>.

Obama Administration

In 2000, President Bill Clinton signed the original Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) into law. This bill laid the groundwork for many of today's approaches to fighting human trafficking. Qualifying trafficking victims were made eligible for federal and state benefits and services, information and translation services were made accessible, and victims were allowed to prolong their stay in the United States over risks and fears abroad.²

This “victim-first” model for human trafficking legislation received bipartisan support at the time and was continually reauthorized, but hidden between the lines of this legislation was the foundation of measures that were later capitalized on by the Obama administration's effort to combat what he called “modern slavery.”³

The 2013 reauthorization of the TVPA led to many public-private partnerships for technology and legal firms.⁴ Earlier authorizations had focused on prosecution and protection; the Obama administration in the 2013 reauthorization put extra emphasis on establishing a victim-centered anti-trafficking network with language like “strengthening partnerships with potential collaborators within underserved populations,” with “underserved populations” earlier defined as “geographic location, religion, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, underserved *racial and ethnic* populations” (emphasis added).⁵ Although DEI as a term was not in widespread use at the time, these initiatives resemble the work the Biden administration would undertake later.

These partnerships were supposed to facilitate the public good, but their funding covertly aided leftist political objectives, prioritizing “underserved populations” in ways largely unrelated to human trafficking. One example of these public-private partnerships was New Perimeter, LLC, a global legal firm that did pro bono work advocating for unaccompanied illegal aliens at the border and giving legal aid to fuel the migrant crisis.⁶ New Perimeter's work is just one piece of an entire NGO ecosystem that grew rapidly during this period.

By giving support and partnership to globalist legal firms, the Obama administration legitimized and emboldened parts of the leftist NGO network. These actions give organizations authority,

² Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, 114 Stat. 1464 (2000).

³ Human Trafficking Institute, “#InContext: President Barack Obama” (Dec. 30, 2025), available at <https://traffickinginstitute.org/incontext-president-barack-obama/>.

⁴ Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2013, Pub. L. No. 113-4, 127 Stat. 58 (2013) (codified as amended in scattered sections of 22, 28, and 42 U.S.C.).

⁵ Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, Pub. L. No. 113-4, 127 Stat. 54 (2013) (codified as amended in scattered sections of 34, 42, and 48 U.S.C.).

⁶ New Perimeter, “Children at the Border” (2011), available at <https://www.newperimeter.com/export/sites/new-perimeter/downloads/projects/Children-At-The-Border1.pdf>.

credibility, and power inside the system of leftist legal and political groups that advocate for expanded DEI policy and thus justify their continued existence. The Center for Renewing America has previously published briefs on this system, wherein money and resources are used to “empower a constellation of entities that create a ‘whole of society’ approach to reinforce the prerogatives of a woke and weaponized federal bureaucracy.”⁷ The “victim-first” approach to trafficking was an important part of this undemocratic infrastructure.

It is important to understand these actions when facing the ballooning cost of “victim support programs” over the years. Although these programs claim to be in service of a good cause, the fine print often tells a different story. Tax dollars and federal agencies’ time were spent on NGOs that propped up education and awareness related to LGBTQ ideology and referrals for immigration attorneys.⁸

Fiscal Year	Human Trafficking Appropriation	Domestic Trafficking Victims Fund (transfer from HHS)	Total
2011	\$10,354,000	N/A	\$10,354,000
2012	\$10,500,000	N/A	\$10,500,000
2013	\$12,403,575	N/A	\$12,403,575
2014	\$14,100,000	N/A	\$14,100,000
2015	\$42,250,000	N/A	\$42,250,000
2016	\$45,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$48,000,000
2017	\$45,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$48,000,000
2018	\$77,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$80,000,000
2019	\$85,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$88,000,000
2020	\$85,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$88,000,000
2021	\$85,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$88,000,000
2022	\$88,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$91,000,000
2023	\$95,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$98,000,000
2024	\$98,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$101,000,000
2025	\$88,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$95,000,000

Source: OJP Funding to Support Develop, Expand, and Strengthen Programs for Victims of Human Trafficking. Ovc.Ojp.Gov. Retrieved June 17, 2026, from

⁷ The Center for Renewing America, “Primer: The National Endowment for Democracy and an NGO Ecosystem Actively Undermining America” (Feb. 7, 2025), available at <https://americarenewing.com/primer-the-national-endowment-for-democracy-and-an-ngo-ecosystem-actively-undermining-america/>.

⁸ Office for Victims of Crime, Grants & Funding, U.S. Dep’t of Just., available at <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/human-trafficking/grants-funding>.

<https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/human-trafficking/grants-funding#ojp-funding-to-support-develop-expand-and-strengthen-programs-fo>.

By the time of the 2018 reauthorization, Republicans had already grown wary of the bloat and potential corruption created by anti-trafficking legislation. During the 2013 reauthorization, Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee had found that “Congress has failed to provide the necessary oversight to ensure this money is being spent efficiently and effectively” and that “there is now a growing bureaucracy of anti-trafficking programs that is wasteful, mismanaged, and duplicative.”⁹ Reportedly, 78 percent of the funding for the Anti-Trafficking in Persons program was directed toward international programs instead of domestic ones, a misallocation that placed the needs of foreign countries over Americans. And only 67 percent of all projects reporting to the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons could provide accurate accounting of their funding and management. That means around one-third of these projects’ funding was unaccounted for.¹⁰ Concerns of failed oversight and budget mismanagement have thus proved prescient.

Biden Administration

The Obama administration laid the foundation for many of the Biden administration’s actions. Biden used the full force of the administrative state to institute an “equitable” approach for “diverse survivors” through its National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking. No longer did the federal government even pretend to combat trafficking itself. Instead, the priority was to “address the systemic inequities that expose vulnerable individuals and marginalized communities to the threat of human trafficking.”¹¹

The Biden administration chose to do nothing about the crisis of human smuggling at the southern border. This led to unprecedented incompetence and neglect on the part of the federal government as thousands of minors, many of whom were illegal aliens, worked in hazardous conditions, leading to many deaths and injuries.¹² By eliminating DNA testing at the border, the administration likely *aided* human traffickers.¹³ This rollback allowed fake family units to easily

⁹ S. Rep. No. 112-96, at 27 (2011), available at <https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/112th-congress/senate-report/96/1?outputFormat=pdf>

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ The White House, “The National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking,” (December 2021), available at <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/National-Action-Plan-to-Combat-Human-Trafficking.pdf>.

¹² Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Minority Staff Report, “The Biden-Harris Administration’s Failure to Protect Unaccompanied Children from Abuse and Exploitation” (November 2024), available at https://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/orr_minority_staff_report.pdf.

¹³ Just the News, “Biden to End Familial DNA Testing at Border, Key Deterrent to Fraud and Child Trafficking” (May 22, 2023), available at

lie and slip across the border together. The administration seems to have given no consideration to the long-term effects of this decision.¹⁴ International cartels exploited the system by smuggling in lethal drugs and victims of human trafficking, with \$13 billion per year in revenue coming from human trafficking operations alone.¹⁵ Per a previous paper published by the Center for Renewing America, the Biden administration's lackluster management of the border led to increased actions by these cartels, with increased fentanyl poisoning and border crossing as symptoms.¹⁶ These problems could have been prevented had the administration not chosen to open the border instead, ignoring both the safety of immigrants and the needs of American citizens.

As the *Blaze* has previously written, anti-trafficking NGOs such as Freedom Network USA exist to train lawyers and certify judges to establish and enforce leftist orthodoxy on issues related to human trafficking.¹⁷ Freedom Network USA received 70 percent of its funding from government grants in 2023.¹⁸ The group also shares ties to Democratic congressmen such as Jamie Raskin and Lucy McBath, who invited its representatives to testify about their "expertise" in human trafficking for Judiciary Subcommittee Democrats.¹⁹ These testimonies chiefly involved complaints about the Trump administration's reductions of partisan NGO funding. They made no attempt to explain or elaborate on how the work they did protected victims; instead, they lamented being forced to fire employees and requested housing, health care, and mental health services funded through taxpayer dollars.²⁰ Supposedly nonpartisan NGOs like this one exist purely to fuel the left-wing patronage and legal machine.

<https://justthenews.com/government/security/exclusive-biden-end-familial-dna-testing-border-key-deterrent-fraud-entry>.

¹⁴ Sen. Chuck Grassley, Letter to Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Sec'y, U.S. Dep't of Health & Hum. Servs. (May 29, 2025), available at

https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley_to_hhs_-_backlog_of_unaccompanied_migrant_children_reports.pdf.

¹⁵ The New York Times, "Smuggling Migrants at the Border Now a Billion-Dollar Business" (July 25, 2022), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/25/us/migrant-smuggling-evolution.html>.

¹⁶ The Center for Renewing America, "It's Time to Wage War on Transnational Drug Cartels" (Oct. 11, 2022), available at <https://americarenewing.com/issues/its-time-to-wage-war-on-transnational-drug-cartels/>.

¹⁷ The Blaze, "The Left Wants to Put MAGA on the Couch—Then on Trial" (June 16, 2026), available at <https://www.theblaze.com/columns/opinion/the-left-wants-to-put-maga-on-the-couch-then-on-trial>.

¹⁸ Influence Watch, "Freedom Network USA (FNUSA)" (accessed August 5, 2026), available at <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/freedom-network-usa-fnusa/>.

¹⁹ House Committee on the Judiciary Democrats, "Subcommittee Democrats Admonish Trump's Freeze on Critical Resources for Victims of Human Trafficking and Online Exploitation" (Feb. 27, 2026), available at <https://democrats-judiciary.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/subcommittee-democrats-admonish-trump-s-freeze-on-critical-resources-for-victims-of-human-trafficking-and-online-exploitation>.

²⁰ *Id.*

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Central American families reportedly sent their children to work and generate income in America, a choice that separated them from family ties and endangered their lives. Rather than combat this form of economic exploitation, the Biden administration changed the vetting approach of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), allowing even more unsecured and untrackable migrants into the country.²¹ According to Alicia Hopper, a counter-human trafficking expert, “Children were routinely kidnapped and funneled into the U.S. for profit. Cartels *infiltrated* NGOs along those smuggling routes” (emphasis added). But that wasn’t all: “An HHS audit later found that 70% of sponsor applications were fraudulent, making proper post-placement welfare checks nearly impossible,” she said.²² These groups are responsible for not just human trafficking but also the trading and distribution of illegal drugs such as fentanyl, which kill thousands of Americans annually. Illicit drug trafficking led to a 23 percent increase in deaths in 2021 under the Biden administration’s lackluster open border policy.²³ In 2024, the pro-illegal alien NGO Annunciation House was sued in Texas over its mismanagement and corruption when housing illegal aliens during the Biden administration. The lawsuit alleged that the NGO had participated in alien harboring and human smuggling while knowing full well that the aliens being transported were not of legal status.²⁴

This kind of abuse is the result of the DEI-laden language and “victim-first” approach to combating human trafficking. Little priority is given to prosecuting and stopping traffickers, border security is no longer seen as necessary (for fear of violating that same DEI ideology), and millions of dollars are funneled to a variety of bureaucratic federal programs for the aid and support of survivors divided into social categories with no proper auditing. A better approach is stopping the problem at its source.

What’s Being Done?

The Trump administration has made excellent progress in reversing these errors. Unaccompanied alien children are being recovered by federal agencies, and DNA testing and fingerprinting requirements have returned, which means that traffickers have a harder time engaging in smuggling.²⁵ By securing the southern border and prosecuting those who would support and

²¹ The New York Times, “As Migrant Children Were Put to Work, U.S. Ignored Warnings” (Apr. 17, 2023), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/17/us/politics/migrant-child-labor-biden.html>.

²² The Center Square, “WATCH: House Committee Dives Into NGOs Involvement in the Border Crisis” (July 26, 2025), available at https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_b0544ca2-ef36-4c1e-8a03-4f8830a4afdb.html.

²³ The Center for Renewing America, “It’s Time to Wage War on Transnational Drug Cartels” (Oct. 11, 2022), available at <https://americarenewing.com/issues/its-time-to-wage-war-on-transnational-drug-cartels/>.

²⁴ *Annunciation House, Inc. v. Paxton*, No. 2024DCV0616 (205th Dist. Ct., El Paso Co., Tex. Feb. 16, 2024).

²⁵ See *supra* note 16.

allow for these acts of human smuggling, the Trump administration has sent a strong and clear message.

These actions are necessary but not permanent. Executive orders, grant freezes, enforcement guidance, and agency reorganizations could all be reversed by a later administration while the statutory funding authorities remain unchanged. Progress has been made in the termination of DEI offices, the woke federal bureaucracy, and the mismanagement of resources.¹¹ The Department of Justice (DOJ) again aims to “support victims of human trafficking and prosecute criminals who exploit children, and ensure the efficient use of taxpayer dollars.”²⁶ The DOJ has also identified 15,500 “super sponsor” cases involving fraudulent custody claims and has issued indictments against individuals accused of conspiring to smuggle minors.²⁷

In December 2025, Trump also issued a proclamation seeking to end the fraud and abuse in the visa system. When Congress expanded eligibility for U and T visas under the Obama administration, and when the Biden administration rolled back vetting for the placement of illegal aliens, they failed to recognize the poor law enforcement records of illegal alien home countries and the different ways in which that lack of proper paperwork would make it easy for the new system to be exploited.²⁸ Trump’s proclamation takes an important step in closing the loopholes and stopping the fraud.

The Obama and Biden administrations’ focus on “gender-based” and “LGBTQ+ inclusion” is beginning to be systemically rooted out. While care is still administered to these groups and violators are still prosecuted, the government is rolling back extra considerations based on social classifications, which slow down what should be a simple process with simple goals: protecting the innocent and prosecuting the perpetrators.²⁹ The administration can terminate individual grants and conditions, and Congress should similarly take steps to eliminate the legal authorities that allow anti-trafficking funding to be redirected toward ideological advocacy rather than direct assistance and enforcement.

²⁶ The Guardian, “US Justice Department Halts Funding for Human-Trafficking Survivors” (Dec. 22, 2025), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/dec/22/justice-department-human-trafficking-survivors-support-funding>.

²⁷ Fox News, “WATCH: Trump DHS Escalates Pressure over Migrant Child Warnings It Says Biden Ignored: ‘Move Heaven and Hell,’” (June 11, 2026), available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/watch-trump-dhs-escalates-pressure-over-migrant-child-warnings-says-biden-ignored-move-heaven-hell>.

²⁸ U.S. Dep’t of State, Proclamation No. 10,998 (December 23, 2025), available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/Intercountry-Adoption-News/presidential-proclamation-10998-on-restricting-and-limiting-the-.html>.

²⁹ See *supra* note 1.

What More Can Be Done?

Because of bureaucracy in the legislative branch, anti-trafficking efforts are still largely victim-centered in the statute. While the Trump administration has made great strides in changing how the law is executed, Congress should change the law's underlying authorizations. Congress authorized and reauthorized the TVPA and the fraudulent, wasteful, and incompetent programs. Congress could use its oversight authority to examine the effects of the Biden administration's disastrous open border policy, but the mounting evidence and research need direction. Congress should seriously consider reevaluating anti-trafficking legislation, where the broadening of immigration statutes, funding of leftist NGOs, and DEI language got their start.

Trafficking legislation should be reformed to direct federal funding toward real support systems like medical care and witness protection, rather than for "advocacy" and "awareness" groups. It should require independent audits of anti-trafficking grants, and strengthen immigration and border security to prevent unlawful human smuggling. Through these efforts, the United States can work toward eradicating human trafficking at home and abroad without giving support to leftist globalist organizations.

Conclusion

The Obama and Biden administrations allowed a necessary anti-trafficking mission to be entangled with woke DEI bureaucracy, activist grantmaking, and identity-first messaging. Trump has begun reversing this trend by attacking federal DEI structures, excising equity mandates from grants and contracts, and focusing on border security, detention, removal, prosecution, and operational control as national priorities. These reforms remain vulnerable to reversal because the statutory grant and partnership framework developed through successive TVPA reauthorizations remains largely intact. Congress should consider reforming the TVPA to finally prioritize dismantling trafficking organizations and international cartels through investigation, prosecution, and coordinated law and border enforcement efforts, while dismantling the government overextension and bloated bureaucracy overseen by the Obama and Biden administrations.