



**Mayor's Office to
Combat Domestic
Violence**



For Immediate Release
July 17, 2014

OCDV Contact: Selvena N. Brooks | 646.484.0774 | OCDVMedia@cityhall.nyc.gov
Sanctuary for Families Contact: Ilyse Fink | 212.575.4545 | 917.455.5974 | ifink@lakpr.com

**MAYOR'S OFFICE TO COMBAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SANCTUARY FOR FAMILIES AND
QUEENS HUMAN TRAFFICKING INTERVENTION COURT ANNOUNCE LAUNCH OF THE
QUEENS HUMAN TRAFFICKING INTERVENTION *PRO BONO* PROJECT**

Queens, NY – Today, the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence (OCDV) Commissioner Rosemonde Pierre-Louis joined with Judge Judy H. Kluger, Executive Director of Sanctuary for Families, Judge Toko Serita, presiding judge of the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court (HTIC), elected officials and community based service providers to announce the establishment of the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project, a new initiative to provide foreign-born defendants in the Human Trafficking Intervention Court who are victims of or individuals at high risk of sex trafficking with *pro bono* legal representation on immigration law matters. The Project builds on the success of the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court, which assists individuals arrested on prostitution and related charges by providing alternatives to incarceration.

The specially-trained *pro bono* attorneys can represent eligible individuals in applications for federal immigration remedies such as T-Visas, or apply to have criminal convictions relating to the trafficking vacated. In addition to *pro bono* legal services, victims will have the ability to access a wide range of civil legal and social services provided through OCDV's New York City Family Justice Center, Queens, where the project will be housed. Over 120 sex trafficking victims have sought services at the four New York Center Family Justice Centers since the Centers opened, and 56% of those victims sought services at the Queens Center.

"This Project will connect survivors of trafficking in the Borough of Queens to specialized *pro bono* immigration services provided by some of New York City's top lawyers," said **Commissioner Rosemonde Pierre-Louis**. "This initiative strengthens the safety net for survivors of sex trafficking, giving them an opportunity at a new start on life. Under the tremendous leadership of Judge Toko Serita, the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court has been a transformative and innovative model. I applaud Sanctuary for Families for their continued leadership in leveraging public-private partnerships in order to address the unique needs of survivors of Gender Based Violence."

"I am committed to making sure our city does everything it can to protect our most vulnerable residents who have lived too long in fear and shadow," **Chirlane McCray, First Lady of New York City and Chair of the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City**. "The Human Trafficking Intervention Court takes a significantly new approach to the complicated issues of victims, mostly women, who have been manipulated by violence and drugs. Providing them with the services they need will help them move forward and build stable, productive lives for themselves and their families."

“The partnership announced today is wonderful example of a coordinated public-private approach that assists a vulnerable and underserved population,” said **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Lilliam Barrios-Paoli**. “This project will provide concrete civil legal immigration and supportive services to human trafficking victims and will help them take the next steps to freedom and safety.”

“We know all too well that the vulnerability, isolation, and continued exploitation of foreign-born victims of sex trafficking is only exacerbated by a lack of immigration status,” said **Hon. Judy H. Kluger, Executive Director of Sanctuary for Families**. “We are thrilled to work in partnership with the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court, the Queens Family Justice Center, and our numerous partner law firms, to extend critical immigration legal services to vulnerable victims in need. By leveraging the contributions of volunteer lawyers, this project will allow us to identify and assist even more immigrant victims of trafficking, helping them formalize their immigration status and attain greater self-sufficiency.”

“The Queens HTIC is designed to provide meaningful intervention and comprehensive services to both domestic and foreign victims of trafficking” said **Hon. Toko Serita**, the Presiding Judge of the HTIC. “Trafficking victims are in need of a variety of services, including housing, multi-abuse trauma-counseling, education, job opportunities and, particularly among foreign-born defendants, immigration services. The announcement of today’s project builds upon the collaborative spirit upon which this court is based, which includes the Queens DA’s Office, the defense bar, and the anti-trafficking service organizations. We can now count on Sanctuary for Families to provide quality legal representation to approximately 40% of the defendants who may be eligible for immigration assistance in addition to the criminal representation they are already receiving. I want to commend Sanctuary for Families and the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence for their leadership in developing this innovative project.”

“For immigrant victims of sex trafficking, access to high-quality immigration legal services can make all the difference in the journey towards rebuilding their lives,” said **Jennifer L. Kroman, Director of Pro Bono Practice at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP**. “We are proud to partner with Sanctuary for Families and the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence in this groundbreaking initiative, which will provide victims with critical legal resources free of charge, while building a network of pro bono attorneys with the skills to tackle complex immigration cases.”

“Human Trafficking and sexual exploitation is not only a global issue, but an issue right here in New York City,” said **New York City Public Advocate Letitia James**. “We must continue to shift the criminality of prostitution onto those who would exploit and abuse victims, while offering intervention and protection to those trapped in the world of sexual exploitation, specifically immigrants who may believe they have few alternative options. The Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence, Sanctuary for Families and Judge Toko Serita have launched the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project to provide trafficking victims with access to free immigration assistance, so that they are best equipped to understand and exercise their rights. This program helps us further achieve our goal of empowering victims and giving them the tools needed to escape abuse and rebuild their lives.”

“The unseen faces of human trafficking often suffer in the shadows and in silence, but this innovative Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project will begin to provide much-needed support and awareness for survivors and their families,” said **Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “Human trafficking has no place in New York City, and I thank Mayor de Blasio for this crucial initiative to connect impacted individuals with the tools to take back and rebuild their lives.”

“Comprehensive immigration assistance is imperative to helping victims of sex trafficking receive the full protections of the law,” said **Commissioner Nisha Agarwal**, Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs. “Getting

a T-visa is transformative for individuals and families, opening up a range of opportunities like work, education and health benefits. The Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project is an important and much-needed program.”

“The Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project provides an innovative approach to the issue of trafficking, providing a needed bridge between the transformative new intervention courts and the service providers on the ground,” said **Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice**. “This is an important step in increasing efforts to ensure that immigrant survivors have access to legal counsel and assistance.”

“I am very proud that Queens is taking the lead role in launching the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project offering isolated and susceptible victims access to reliable immigration assistance through this comprehensive program,” said **Queens Borough President Melinda Katz**. “Access to reliable immigration assistance can play a pivotal role in escaping their traffickers and rebuilding their lives. I want to thank Judge Toko Serita, from the Human Trafficking Intervention Court, the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence and its Family Justice Center, and Sanctuary for Families for building on this foundation that will connect sex trafficking victims to culturally sensitive pro bono attorneys, in a safe and nurturing environment at the Family Justice Center here in Queens.”

“Queens County has been, over the years, in the forefront of efforts to protect trafficking victims and bring their traffickers to justice,” said **Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown**. “My office, for example, brought not only the first sex trafficking indictment in the State and obtained the first sex trafficking conviction but, in collaboration with the court system, pioneered the Human Trafficking Intervention Part in Queens County which offers individuals charged with prostitution-related offenses the opportunity to attend treatment or service programs targeted for human trafficking victims – many of whom are members of our county’s diverse immigrant community. Since 2004, more than 1,000 victims have benefited from the services provided by the Part – which has served as a model for the rest of the State. I am confident that the initiative that we are announcing today to provide *pro bono* attorneys for legal consultation will enhance our efforts and significantly assist trafficking victims to more readily obtain the immigration services they need to move on with their lives. I commend all those involved – the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence, Sanctuary for Families and the *pro bono* attorneys – for their efforts in launching this exciting initiative, and thank Judge Serita and all of our partners at the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court for their important contribution to this effort as well.”

“There are some 27 million slaves in the world today, more than at any other time in human history,” said **State Senator Jose Peralta**. “Most are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation; the vast majority are female. And make no mistake, many of these women are being abused and exploited in public and private locations in our very own communities, right here in family-friendly Queens. I will do all that I can to support and ensure the success of this thoughtful, compassionate and intelligent initiative.”

The issue of human trafficking has recently gained global attention, shedding light on a largely under-served and often overlooked community. Many victims assisted through this program have been subjected to physical violence, threats and other coercive tactics at the hands of traffickers to be exploited in the streets, brothels, or massage parlors of Queens. Based on OCDV stats, as of March 30, 2014, Queens accounted for 67 cases out of 120 trafficking clients at the City’s four Family Justice Centers. With a 47% foreign-born population in Queens, trafficking has had a disparate impact on the borough, particularly on Asian and Latina individuals.

“As a long-time advocate for survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence and sexual assault, I am pleased to see the launch of the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project take place in my home Borough,” said **Council Member Julissa Ferreras, Chair of the Committee on Finance**. “This program will undoubtedly benefit countless individuals who have been subjected to inhumane treatment by providing access to essential legal services and support. I applaud the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, Judge Toko Serita and Sanctuary for Families for working together to help those who have been affected by sexual violence and creating a productive dialogue on an issue that has been long overlooked and stigmatized.”

“I am very proud to be partnering with Commissioner Rose Pierre-Louis to launch this groundbreaking Queens Human Trafficking Intervention *Pro Bono* Project right here in Queens,” said **Council Member Elizabeth Crowley, chair of the New York City Council Committee on Fire & Criminal Justice and co-chair of the NYC Council Women’s Caucus**. “Queens is the epicenter of human trafficking in New York City, and so we must also be the front line in the fight to end it. These vulnerable, sexually exploited victims need our support and compassion – not to be treated as criminals.”

“Human trafficking is an issue that affects women, children, and families across the United States and around the world,” **Council Member Laurie A. Cumbo, chair of the New York City Council Committee on Women’s Issues**. “Judge Toko Serita, Sanctuary for Families and the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence have taken the initiative to provide much-needed support and services to bring an end to the trafficking and exploitation of women in New York City. As one of the largest urban cities in the world, we have to create a model that can be replicated in other cities to help victims of domestic violence begin a new chapter in their life that is both safe and nurturing. As our City's diversity continues to grow, it is imperative that we raise awareness of all forms of violence against women and ensure that they are knowledgeable of their rights, protections under the law, and have access to support programs. No victim - irrespective of their immigration status - should feel ashamed, alone, or abandoned in a nation that prides itself on the celebration of fundamental human rights.”

“Providing free immigration advice and legal representation through this new pilot program will help to stop treating the many victims of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking like criminals by giving them a real chance at rebuilding their lives,” said **Council Member Daniel Dromm, chair of the New York City Council Committee on Education**. “I commend the Mayor’s Office, Sanctuary for Families and Judge Toko Serita for combating sex trafficking here in the borough of Queens.”

“Many women arrested for prostitution in New York are actually victims themselves and it is essential for our criminal justice system to adopt a comprehensive approach that goes beyond blaming the victim,” said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson, chair of the New York City Council Committee on Public Safety**. “While this pilot program is focused on Queens County, it is an innovative first step in a broader strategy that will reach out to all five boroughs of our City, and I look forward to working with Sanctuary for Families, Judge Serita and the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence as we seek to end the cycle of abuse and violence that has had such a devastating impact on so many of New York’s families for far too long.”

“As an agency that has been providing culturally sensitive and linguistically relevant immigration legal services to victims from the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court since 2011, the New York Asian Women’s Center (NYAWC) enthusiastically supports Sanctuary for Families’ new *pro bono* program that will extend the reach of these critical services and immigration relief to a broader range of potential applicants,” said **Yasmeen Hamza, Director of Client Services at New York Asian Women's Center**.

“In our work with survivors of domestic violence in Queens, we know how difficult it is for victims with no immigration status to leave an abusive relationship,” said **Alexandra Patino, Executive Director of the NYC Family Justice Center, Queens**. “This collaboration will expand increase our capacity to better serve survivors of sex trafficking at the Queens Family Justice Center and we are delighted to house the program. We are very grateful to the attorneys who have generously volunteered their time and expertise for this underserved population. We know this will be a critical step in helping victims of trafficking to rebuild their lives.”

About the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence/New York City Family Justice Center, Queens:

The Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, established in 2001, oversees the citywide delivery of domestic violence services and operates four New York City Family Justice Centers including one in Kew Gardens, Queens, which provide comprehensive services for victims domestic violence, trafficking and elder abuse under one roof and are co-located with local District Attorney’s Offices.

About Sanctuary for Families

[Sanctuary for Families](#) is New York’s leading service provider and advocate for survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking, and related forms of gender violence. Each year, Sanctuary empowers thousands of adults and children to move from fear and abuse to safety and stability, transforming lives through a comprehensive range of services.

Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court

The Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court has been lauded as a national model for its innovative approach to assisting individual arrested on prostitution and related criminal charges, and providing them with a wide array of social services. The guiding principle of the HTIC is that individuals arrested on prostitution charges should be treated not as criminals, but as victims and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

###