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AAHOA Announces New Partnerships to Raise Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention

WASHINGTON, D.C., Jan. 31 — Today, AAHOA announced new partnerships with Polaris, Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST), and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Blue Campaign as the Association and its members continue a proactive educational campaign to combat human trafficking. January is designated as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

AAHOA President and CEO Chip Rogers said, "The lodging industry is at the forefront of preventing human trafficking with national programs and brand initiatives. No respectable hotelier wants these purveyors of human suffering as guests nor do they want to profit by providing a location for their illicit and immoral enterprise. But if they can't see the signs, they run the risk of allowing this detestable practice to carry on under their roof. That's why AAHOA is proud to partner with Polaris, BEST, and the Blue Campaign to provide our members and their employees with the resources to identify and prevent human trafficking."

Increasingly, traffickers seek to exploit the anonymity and privacy offered by hotels, and the regular turnover of clientele makes hotels attractive to traffickers who favor changing location frequently to evade law enforcement.

AAHOA Chairman Bhavesh Patel noted, "By working closely with organizations that specialize in the prevention of human trafficking, we can empower hoteliers to take the steps necessary to protect their guests, their properties, and their reputations while identifying and assisting victims and helping them to restore their freedom and dignity." Over the past year, Patel made trafficking prevention a focus of his chairmanship and encouraged AAHOA members to adopt a hands-on role in providing staff training and education.

"The hospitality industry has a critical role in disrupting the human trafficking networks that operate in communities across the United States," said Bradley Myles, CEO of Polaris. "Hospitality workers can be the eyes and ears on the ground, recognizing patterns and seeing suspicious activity that can be reported to law enforcement or the National Human Trafficking

Hotline. We are excited to partner with AAHOA to expand comprehensive training and educational tools, and support to its members and their employees.”

AAHOA holds over 150 events per year for its members across the country, including seminars, town halls, webinars, and a national convention. While AAHOA has been raising awareness of human trafficking issues with its membership for many years, these new partnerships will provide members with industry-specific trainings, certifications, and best practices designed to ensure hoteliers and their employees are equipped to identify, prevent, and report human trafficking. AAHOA is also committed to working with victims' rights groups and lawmakers on the state and federal level to support laws giving hoteliers and prosecutors alike more tools to stop the victimization of men, women, and children in human trafficking.

Mar Brettmann, PhD, Executive Director of BEST, an organization that seeks to bring the business community into state and national efforts and protocols to combat slavery and trafficking said, “Efforts to educate hotel staff in identifying the signs of human trafficking are an invaluable tool in assisting victims, bringing exploiters to justice, and ensuring hotel properties remain safe and secure for all guests.”

Michael McKeown, Executive Director of the Blue Campaign said, “We are confident that cooperation and education will help hoteliers and their staff identify the signs of human trafficking and work with DHS and other law enforcement partners to prevent one of the greatest scourges of our society. The front desk can be a front line in this fight.”

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AAHOA is the largest hotel owners' association in the world. The nearly 18,000 AAHOA members own almost one in every two hotels in the United States. With billions of dollars in property assets and hundreds of thousands of employees, AAHOA members are core economic contributors in virtually every community. AAHOA is a proud defender of free enterprise and the foremost current-day example of realizing the American dream.