

Rising against human trafficking in Montclair

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Tracy Thompson, New Jersey's assistant attorney general, has a strong opinion about why human and sex trafficking is such a diabolical industry.

Photo courtesy of Tracy Thompson

New Jersey Assistant Attorney General Tracy Thompson

"It's a crime that preys on our most vulnerable citizens and exploits people at their lowest points," Thompson told The Montclair Times. "Traffickers and recruiters are like predators."

If that simple message rings home, read on.

Thompson will be the featured presenter and a panelist at a free public forum, "A Call to Awareness and Action to End Human Trafficking," which will take place at Union Baptist Church, 12 Midland Ave., next Wednesday, July 16, at 7:30 p.m.

According to a release, additional invited guests and speakers at the forum include Acting Essex County Prosecutor Carolyn Murray; Mayor Robert Jackson; Montclair Police Chief David Sabagh; 4th Ward Township Councilwoman Renée Baskerville; Michelle Russell, the Montclair School District's chief talent officer; and a representative from the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives.

Thompson said that the fact that Montclair is an affluent suburb isn't an excuse for residents to be oblivious when it comes to the issue of human trafficking.

"Any one of us could be in that situation at any time," warned Thompson.

Thompson gave several examples of how people might suddenly find themselves or their loved ones forced into the world of human trafficking: disasters that leave them homeless such as Superstorm Sandy or house fires, being kidnapped or blackmailed, or even trying to "make a little extra money" and getting into a situation they can't get out of.

The Rev. Campbell Singleton, pastor of Union Baptist, told The Times that he hopes the forum will help to "bring awareness to the worldwide crisis of human trafficking," and put forth a call to action.

Singleton said that the event was partially inspired by the kidnapping in May of nearly 300 schoolgirls in Nigeria.



"As a community of faith, we believe that trafficking persons violates human freedom to be who God has created us to be," stated Singleton. "It demeans and devalues the sacredness of human life, and exploits people for monetary profit at the expense of their physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing. We are incensed and outraged at such diabolical practices and join the chorus of prophetic voices who are condemning it and calling for justice."

Thompson said that she expects attendees at the forum to come away more aware and educated, and hopes that they will take action and help to support the victims of sex trafficking, especially if it's occurring in a bar, salon, massage parlor or any other location in their own neighborhood.

Noted Thompson: "Human trafficking is happening all around us, but people may not recognize it when they see it."

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