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SunLine Transit Agency Launches Human Trafficking Awareness Campaign

The Agency Partnered with the Coachella Valley Coalition Against Human Trafficking to Educate the Community on this Increasingly Prevalent Issue

(Thousand Palms, CA) SunLine Transit Agency has launched a Human Trafficking Awareness Campaign that will appear on internal and external bus advertisements and bus shelters, as well as regional print publications and television/radio stations. The goal of the 6-month initiative is to educate the public about the signs of human trafficking, and how to report what appears to be a suspicious situation. Human trafficking is the force, fear and coercion to compel another person into commercial sex acts or labor trafficking against their will.

Human trafficking *does* happen in our communities, according to Investigator Aron Wolfe with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. "Human trafficking isn't something that just happens in big cities or at the border – it exists right here," Wolfe explains. "If everyone can be more aware of their surroundings, any one of us can be a disruptive force in the human trafficking routes of those being coerced into labor or sex trafficking."

Investigator Wolfe is an active member of the recently-formed Coachella Valley Coalition Against Human Trafficking – which SunLine partnered with to ensure the proper messages were being communicated and to conduct training with the Agency's bus operators and safety team members. Other local members of the Coalition represent organizations that are often in close contact with human trafficking victims such as the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center, SafeHouse of the Desert and the United Way.

Traffickers exploit legitimate systems within multiple business such as banks to store their earnings, buses to move their victims around, and hotel rooms to fulfill their operations. That's why SunLine Transit Agency spearheaded an awareness campaign for this initiative, which is funded, in part, through the Innovations in Transit Public Safety Grant by the Federal Transit Administration.

"SunLine is committed to creating awareness on this critical issue in order to prevent and disrupt human trafficking systems," said Lauren Skiver, CEO/General Manager of SunLine

Transit Agency. "This initiative will reach many thousands of people in our community, informing both our riders and the general public regarding the prevalence of human trafficking and how to help if someone recognizes a situation that could be an incident of human trafficking."

The goal of this campaign is to educate the public about the signs of human trafficking, provide a call-to-action for those who feel they may be witnessing a human trafficking incident, to create an overall increased awareness of human trafficking in the community, and to share resources that will allow others to take steps that will help stop human trafficking.

To learn more about this initiative – including red flag indicators, high risk victim commonalities, recognizing the signs of human trafficking and how to help – go to www.sunline.org/trafficking.

To report any suspicious situation that seems like it may be an instance of human trafficking, the community can call 1-888-373-7888, text BeFree to 233733 or "live chat" at www.polarisproject.org.

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About SunLine Transit Agency

SunLine provides public transit services in California's Coachella Valley spanning 1,120 mile-service area and carrying approximately 4.2 million riders. It has pioneered zero-emission bus deployments, particularly for hydrogen fuel cell electric buses (FCEB). In 1993, SunLine's Board adopted a voluntary policy of pursuing alternative fuel solutions that provide the lowest possible emissions, which led to SunLine becoming the first transit agency in the state to convert its entire fleet to compressed natural gas (CNG). SunLine is committed to transitioning its entire bus fleet to zero-emission by 2035. SunLine Refueled is a multi-tiered initiative that brings exciting new transportation alternatives to the Coachella Valley. To learn more about SunLine Transit Agency's services and policies, go to SunLine.org.

About the Coachella Valley Coalition Against Human Trafficking

The Coachella Valley Coalition Against Human Trafficking facilitates the collaboration of organizations within the desert communities by constructing a united response to human trafficking within Eastern Riverside County. The Coalition aims to approach these issues within a multi-disciplinary approach of committed partners to provide consistent best practices in the fight against human trafficking in the greater Coachella Valley. The Coalition will emphasize on local and international human trafficking, which includes sexual exploitation, sex slavery, forced labor, and domestic servitude through awareness, education, service, and advocacy efforts. For more information about the Coalition, reach out to the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center at 760-340-2336 or contact via email on the website: <https://barbarasinatrachildrencenter.org/>.