



## Preventing Trafficking in Disasters Act 2026: Increasing Education, Training & Outreach



### OVERVIEW

Natural disasters demand a workforce that can be mobilized quickly, often under dangerous conditions. These “**resiliency workers**” or “**secondary responders**”—utility crews, debris removal teams, construction workers, electricians, and day laborers—are disproportionately immigrants who are undocumented or hold temporary status, with limited English proficiency.<sup>1</sup>

The disaster restoration industry has grown substantially over the past two decades in step with the rise in natural disasters.<sup>2</sup> California now leads the nation, with roughly 136 formal establishments providing Natural Disaster and Emergency Relief Services and employing more than 3,000 workers.<sup>3</sup> As disasters become more frequent, the sector continues to expand, with employment rising at an annualized rate of 6.8% from 2020 to 2025.<sup>4</sup>

Reports consistently show<sup>5</sup> that resiliency workers face **fatal hazards, stolen wages, assaults, and human trafficking**, yet rarely assert their rights due to fear of retaliation or immigration enforcement.<sup>6</sup> Employers and contractors often lack the training to recognize trafficking indicators or intervene safely.

<sup>1</sup> Nina Lakhani, “Private Equity Profits from Climate Disaster Clean-Up-While investing in Fossil Fuels,” *The Guardian* (Sept. 7, 2023) available at <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/07/private-equity-climate-crisis-disaster-cleanup>

<sup>2</sup> Private Equity Stakeholder Project and Resilience Force, *Private Equity Profits from Disaster at the Expense of Workers, Communities and Climate*, (August 2023), available at <https://pestakeholder.org/reports/new-report-private-equity-profits-from-disaster/>

<sup>3</sup> The reported 3,029 workers employed in Natural Disaster and Emergency Relief Services capture only direct employees and exclude the many subcontracted, temporary, and informal workers who perform restoration and recovery work. While the figure reflects the industry’s growth, it likely understates the true size of the workforce; IBISWorld, *Industry Performance of the Natural Disaster & Emergency Relief Services Industry in California* (August 2025), available at <https://www.ibisworld.com/usa/industry/california/natural-disaster-emergency-relief-services/14939/>

<sup>4</sup> The reported 3,029 workers employed in Natural Disaster and Emergency Relief Services capture only direct employees and exclude the many subcontracted, temporary, and informal workers who perform restoration and recovery work. While the figure reflects the industry’s growth, it likely understates the true size of the workforce.

<sup>5</sup> See Transportation & Trafficking Resource Center (TAT) – “*Natural Disasters create a fertile ground for human traffickers*” (2025), available at <https://acf.gov/opre/report/labor-trafficking-construction-during-recovery-and-reconstruction-natural-disaster><https://tatnonprofit.org/natural-disasters/>; Center for Public Integrity – “*Toxic Labor – Disaster Workers*” (2023), available at <https://publicintegrity.org/environment/toxic-labor/toxic-labor-disaster-workers/>; Waren, Warren, *Wage Theft Among Latino Day Laborers in Post-Katrina New Orleans: Comparing Contractors with Other Employers*, 15 *J. Int’l Migration & Integration* 4 (2014): 737-51, available at <https://workercenterlibrary.org/resources/wage-theft-among-latino-day-laborers-in-post-katrina-new-orleans-comparing-contractors-with-other-employers/>; Nik Theodore, *After the Storm: Houston’s Day Labor Markets in the Aftermath of Hurricane Harvey*, University of Illinois at Chicago (Nov. 2017), available at [https://greatcities.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/After-the-Storm-Theodore\\_2017.pdf](https://greatcities.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/After-the-Storm-Theodore_2017.pdf); *Labor Trafficking in Construction*, OPRE Report No. 2024-253 available at <https://acf.gov/opre/report/labor-trafficking-construction-during-recovery-and-reconstruction-natural-disaster/>

Kelle Barrick et al. *Labor Trafficking in Construction During the Recovery and Reconstruction from a Natural Disaster* (Sept. 2024) at 5, available at [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/opre-HTPRAP-natural-disasters-oct24\\_0.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/opre-HTPRAP-natural-disasters-oct24_0.pdf); National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) – “*Immigrant Day Laborers as Second Responders in Climate Disasters*” (2022), available at <https://ndl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Recovering-from-Climate-Disasters-Report-2.26.22.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Stillman, “The Migrant Workers Who Follow Climate Disasters,” *The New Yorker* (Nov. 1, 2021), available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/11/08/the-migrant-workers-who-follow-climate-disasters>; Hilary Beaumont, “*Exploitative contracts and hazardous conditions: life for some of the immigrants cleaning up wildfire-stricken LA*,” *The Guardian* (Apr. 28, 2025), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/28/la-wildfires-cleanup-hazards>

Disaster-related jobs—marked by dispersed worksites, minimal oversight, and long subcontracting chains—magnify these risks, leaving thousands of workers vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

California has addressed similar abuses in other high-risk industries through **Civil Code § 52.6**, which requires “**Know Your Rights**” (KYR) postings in sectors where trafficking is prevalent. Since 2013, the law has expanded to cover 15 industries, most recently adding emergency departments and pediatric facilities in 2024.<sup>8</sup>

California has also enacted specific **required training** of workers in hotel, EMT responders and transportation industries included under § 52.6.<sup>9</sup> The evolution of these efforts demonstrates California’s commitment to proactively adapt its laws to emerging vulnerabilities, ensuring that workers and the public are better equipped to recognize, report, and prevent human trafficking across high-risk sectors. Disaster recovery workforces share the same risk profile, underscoring the urgent need for comparable safeguards.

With climate change intensifying wildfires, floods, droughts, and extreme heat, the demand for resiliency workers is growing. Implementing **Know Your Rights** postings and **standardized training requirements** is a **critical first step** to ensuring these workers know their rights, recognize trafficking risks, and access support.

## PROBLEM: A PERVASIVE LACK OF AWARENESS

- **Disaster conditions amplify trafficking risks:** weakened infrastructure, isolated worksites, and informal labor markets allow traffickers to operate with impunity.<sup>10</sup>
- **Resiliency workers are uniquely vulnerable:** immigrant, temporary, and linguistically isolated workers face coercive recruitment, deception about wages and housing, withheld pay, debt bondage, and forced overtime.<sup>11</sup>
- **Evidence of heightened risk:**
  - Civil Cases brought by workers since 2007 have consistently demonstrated the trafficking of workers in disaster zones.<sup>12</sup>
  - In Houston, **32% of construction workers** in disaster response areas reported trafficking experiences. This same study of the construction industry found disaster-zone workers were **2x more likely** to experience labor trafficking than those at non-disaster sites.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Stillman, “The Migrant Workers Who Follow Climate Disasters,” *The New Yorker* (Nov. 1, 2021), *available at* <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/11/08/the-migrant-workers-who-follow-climate-disasters>

<sup>8</sup> Cal. Assemb. Bill 1740, 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2023) (enacted July 21, 2023, ch. 104, 2023 Cal. Stat.)

<sup>9</sup> Cal. S. Bill 970, 2017–18 Reg. Sess., ch. 842, 2018 Cal. Stat. expanded training for workers in the hospitality industry; Cal. Assemb. Bill 2034, 2017–18 Reg. Sess., ch. 812, 2018 Cal. Stat. expanded training for workers in the intercity transportation industry and Cal. Assemb. Bill 2130, 2021–22 Reg. Sess., ch. 256, 2022 Cal. Stat. requiring EMT professionals to complete a training on identifying human trafficking.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Dep’t of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2025* (2025), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/>; See Katherine Hoogesteyn, Leanne McCallum Desselle, Kelle Barrick, Rebecca Pfeiffer, Lauren Vollinger, “The Intersection of Human Trafficking and Natural Disasters: A Scoping Review,” (Feb. 13, 2024), *available at* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38347820/>

<sup>11</sup> See Katherine Hoogesteyn, Leanne McCallum Desselle, Kelle Barrick, Rebecca Pfeiffer, Lauren Vollinger, “The Intersection of Human Trafficking and Natural Disasters: A Scoping Review,” (Feb. 13, 2024), *available at* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38347820/>

<sup>12</sup> “Case Examples of Labor Trafficking in the Wake of Natural Disasters”, Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative at Loyola Law School (January 2025), *available at*

<https://www.lls.edu/media/loyolalawschool/academics/clinicexperientiallearning/sji/publicationsandreports/Case%20Examples%20of%20Labor%20Trafficking%20in%20the%20Wake%20of%20Natural%20Disasters.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Barrick, K., Pfeiffer, R., Tueller, S., & Bradshaw, M., *Labor Trafficking in Construction During the Recovery and Reconstruction from a Natural Disaster*, OPRE Report No. 2024-253, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (2024), *available at* <https://acf.gov/opre/report/labor-trafficking-construction-during-recovery-and-reconstruction-natural-disaster/>; See Texas study surveying 903 workers, RTI International / Administration for Children and Families (ACF) – “*Labor Trafficking*

- Resiliency workers are **twice as likely** to face coercive recruitment, withheld wages, and exploitative debt compared to peers outside disaster zones.<sup>14</sup>
- Survivors consistently report that **earlier access to information could have enabled escape** from exploitation.<sup>15</sup>
- A nationwide study of state legislative efforts **concluded that hotline posting requirements were the only statistically significant measure that led to increased identification** and prosecution of human trafficking cases.<sup>16</sup>

## CASE EXAMPLES: TRAFFICKING IN REBUILDING EFFORTS

*Rodrigues v. Belfor USA Group* (E.D. La. 2022): Over 1,000 immigrant workers restoring public buildings post-Katrina were exploited through subcontracting schemes designed to evade wage laws. Denied overtime and coerced into abusive conditions, their case exposed systemic trafficking risks in large-scale rebuild projects.

*David et al. v. Signal International LLC* (E.D. La. 2015) Hundreds of Indian workers recruited to rebuild oil rigs after Katrina were confined in guarded camps, charged exorbitant fees, and subjected to forced labor. A federal jury ordered Signal International to pay \$14 million in damages for trafficking and labor exploitation.

*Castellanos-Contreras v. Decatur Hotels* (5th Cir. 2009): Hotel workers recruited after Katrina were forced into debt bondage, paying thousands in fees for jobs that left them earning below minimum wage. The case illustrates how traffickers exploit desperate labor markets in disaster zones.

*Garcia v. Audubon Communities Management* (E.D. La. 2009): Day laborers repairing homes post-Katrina were promised fair wages but instead faced nonpayment and threats of deportation if they resisted. This coercion and abuse exemplify labor trafficking during residential reconstruction.

*Muangmol Asanok v. Million Express Manpower* (E.D.N.C. 2007): Thai workers were lured with false promises of agricultural jobs, charged \$11,000 in recruitment fees, and then diverted after Hurricane Katrina to demolition work in New Orleans. They faced debt bondage and wage theft — classic labor trafficking indicators.

## SOLUTION: INCREASING EDUCATION & OUTREACH

This legislation expands [Civil Code § 52.6](#) and adds section **§12950.4 to the Government Code** as well adds **§11006 to the Labor code** to require:

- **Know Your Rights Postings** at:
  - Designated disaster sites.



*in Construction During the Recovery and Reconstruction from a Natural Disaster* (2024), available at <https://acf.gov/opre/report/risk-and-protective-factors-experiencing-labor-trafficking-and-other-labor-abuse>

<sup>14</sup> Kelle Barrick, Rebecca Pfeffer, et. al., Labor Trafficking in Construction: Is Working in the Aftermath of a Natural Disaster a Risk Factor? *Journal on Human Trafficking* (Apr. 16, 2025), available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2025.2492514>

<sup>15</sup> Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking, *Strengthen Human Trafficking Hotline Enforcement: SB 630 (Stern) Fact Sheet* (Mar. 6, 2019), [https://www.castla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SB630\\_Hotline\\_FactSheet\\_03062019.pdf](https://www.castla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SB630_Hotline_FactSheet_03062019.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Vanessa Bouche, Amy Farrell & Dana Wittmer, "Identifying Effective Countertrafficking Programs and Practices in the U.S.: Legislative, Legal and Public Opinion Strategies that Work," Nat'l Institute of Justice (Nov. 2015) available at <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/identifying-effective-counter-trafficking-programs-and-practices-us>

- Businesses or establishments hiring or deploying disaster-response workers.
- **Mandatory training** for resiliency workers, supervisors, and workers engaged in compliance efforts. This is modeled after hospitality-sector trafficking prevention training and includes:
  - Human trafficking prevention training tailored to disaster-response risks<sup>17</sup>.
  - Clear statewide standards for content and delivery.
  - Subcontractor and vendor compliance requirements.
  - Corrective enforcement through the Civil Rights Department (CRD).
  - Minimum statewide baseline to ensure consistency and protect all workers.

By situating enforcement with CRD and within the California Workplace Outreach Project, the Act emphasizes **education, guidance, and corrective action**, helping employers meet obligations while protecting vulnerable workers.

## PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE LANGUAGE

### Amend California Civil Code § 52.6 to expand education and outreach through Know Your Rights Postings & Resources

(16) Designated Disaster Sites as defined by [19 Cal. Code Regs. § 2900 \(gg\)](#)

(17) Any businesses, contractor, subcontractor, or public agency that hires or deploys workers response, cleanup, or recovery efforts following a state- or federally-declared natural disaster

(18) Any businesses, contractor, subcontractor, or public agency that hires or deploys workers to prevent or mitigate the occurrence of a natural disaster



### Amend 12950.4 to Government Code to Require Training all Resiliency Workers

#### (a) Applicability:

1. Every employer in the disaster-restoration services sector (including establishments contracted for disaster prevention work, remediation, water-damage, fire-damage, mold-remediation, reconstruction, and allied services) which regularly employs or contracts with [X or more persons] in California shall provide the training required under this Section to all supervisory employees and nonsupervisory employees.
2. For the purposes of this "employee" anyone directly employed by the employer or employed through a subcontractor, including temporary workers
3. New nonsupervisory employees shall receive this training at the time of hire. New supervisory employees within 1 months of assuming a supervisory role. Thereafter, each such employee shall receive refresher training at least once every two years.

#### (b) Content of Training: The training shall include all of the following

1. Information on the state laws prohibiting human trafficking and forced labor, including debt bondage
2. Practical guidance for identifying risk factors, red-flags, and indicators of human trafficking in the context of disaster restoration work, including in subcontractor relationships, temporary labor, on-site workers, cleaning crews, restoration crews, and third-party vendors (e.g., army corps of engineers, laborers, equipment movers, cleaning staff).

<sup>17</sup>California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, 2023 California State Hazard Mitigation Plan, Volume 1, Part 4 (Nov. 10, 2023), [https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Hazard-Mitigation/Documents/2023-California-SHMP\\_Volume-1-Part-4\\_11.10.2023.pdf](https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Hazard-Mitigation/Documents/2023-California-SHMP_Volume-1-Part-4_11.10.2023.pdf).

3. Practical examples and case scenarios relevant to the disaster restoration industry (for example: a subcontractor who uses undocumented workers and threatens workers with immigration enforcement; a crew housed in substandard accommodation after a disaster; a worker who is paid little or nothing, forced to work off-the-books, or moved across locations).
4. The employer's obligations for prevention, internal reporting, investigation, and remediation of suspected human-trafficking or forced-labor incidents within the employer's operations, subcontractors, or supply chain.
5. Remedies, protections and resources available to victims of human trafficking or forced labor, and the employer's responsibility to cooperate with law enforcement and relevant agencies.
6. The employer's anti-retaliation obligations for any employee who reports suspected human trafficking, forced labor, or other exploitative labor practices.
7. The contact information of appropriate agencies, including, but not limited to, the National Human Trafficking Hotline toll-free telephone number, 1-888-373-7888, and text line, 233733, and the telephone numbers of the appropriate local law enforcement agencies.

**(c) Resources to support survivors of trafficking:** The human trafficking awareness training and education required by subdivision (b) may also include, but is not limited to private nonprofit organizations that represent the interests of victims of human trafficking

**(d) Method of Training:** The training may be delivered via classroom, video, webinar, e-learning, or other effective methods, provided it includes a qualified trainer familiar with human-trafficking prevention, labor compliance and disaster-service operations and is delivered in the native language of the worker.

**(e) Subcontractors and Vendors:** The employer shall ensure that all subcontractors, vendors or temporary workers engaged in disaster restoration services in California are informed of the human-trafficking prevention policy and have completed equivalent training or have acknowledged training provided by the employer. The employer shall require subcontractors to certify compliance and authorize audits of labor practices and worker accommodations.

**(f) Liability/ Enforcement:**

1. The lack of reporting of a human trafficking case that occurs at a worksite overseen by the employe, shall not, by itself, result in the liability of any employer or employee of that establishment to the human trafficking victim or victims in the case in question or to any other legal party.
2. If an employer violates this section, the department may seek an order requiring the employer to comply with these requirements.

**(g) Policy Implementation:** It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this section to establish a minimum threshold for human trafficking awareness training and education. This section shall not be construed to discourage or relieve an employer from providing for longer, more frequent, or more elaborate training and education regarding human trafficking awareness. It is further the intent of the Legislature to encourage employers to take all reasonable steps necessary to lead to the rescue of human trafficking victims and prevent any kind of human trafficking in their establishments.



## **Amend Division 7 of Labor Code (commencing with Section 11006) to train workers in the California Workplace Outreach Project (CWOP)<sup>18</sup>**

11001 (d): “Disaster related work” means that work which is being carried out at disaster sites as defined by [19 Cal. Code Regs. § 2900 \(gg\)](#)

11006. Mandatory Training for Qualified Organizations Engaging Disaster-Related Workers.

- (a) Any qualified organization receiving funds under this division to conduct outreach, education, or worker-engagement activities for workers involved in natural disaster prevention, response, remediation, or recovery efforts shall complete the mandatory training established pursuant to Section 12950.4 of the Government Code.
- (b) The Department shall verify completion of the training required under subdivision (a) as a condition of awarding, renewing, or continuing funding under this division.
- (c) The training shall be completed by all staff of a qualified organization who directly engage with workers under this program and shall be renewed in accordance with the schedule set forth in Section [insert cite] of the Government Code.
- (d) Failure to comply with the training requirements of this section shall result in suspension of program activities and may result in the termination or non-renewal of a grant or contract issued under this division.

### **MINIMAL FISCAL COST**

- Expanding § 52.6 has historically imposed **minimal costs**.<sup>19</sup>
- Human Trafficking training mandates in other industries have been implemented with a **negligible fiscal impact**.<sup>20</sup>
- Changes made to Division 7 of the Labor Code can be done upon appropriation of funds as SB 578 has been enacted.<sup>21</sup>
- This Act leverages existing enforcement structures and proven low-cost education models, ensuring **no additional financial burden** on the state.

### **CONCLUSION**

Laws only protect when workers know their rights. By requiring Know Your Rights postings and standardized training for resiliency workers and those who oversee compliance with safety and work standards, California can prevent the trafficking and exploitation that consistently emerge in disaster recovery. Amending the Civil Code, Government Code and Labor Code to extend these proven safeguards will equip vulnerable workers to recognize abuse, assert protections, and strengthen the state’s disaster response workforce.

<sup>18</sup> The California Workplace Outreach Project (CWOP) began under COVID and was recently awarded \$6 million to 21 community based organization to ensure worker safety and rights following the LA Fires. This program has become a permanent fixture in education and outreach efforts with the passage of SB 578 (2025)

<sup>19</sup> A.B. 1740, Assemb. Appropriations Comm., Analysis of A.B. 1740 (April 26, 2023)(Cal.), *available at* <https://trackbill.com/s3/bills/CA/2023/AB/1740/analyses/assembly-appropriations.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> S.B. 970, Assemb. Appropriations Comm., Analysis of S.B. 970 (August 15, 2018) (Cal.), *available at* [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180SB970#](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB970#)

<sup>21</sup> S.B. B 578 (2025–2026 Leg.), ch.771, Statutes of 2025

## ABOUT THE SUNITA JAIN ANTI TRAFFICKING INITIATIVE

Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Policy Initiative (SJI) is an evidence-based and survivor-informed think tank based out of Loyola Law School. SJI intentionally works towards systemic change and filling the gaps in human trafficking prevention by focusing its policy advocacy on the intersectionality of 5 pillars: Government Accountability, Racial Justice, Immigrant Justice, Climate Justice and Economic Justice.

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