

# EMPOWER OVERSIGHT

*Whistleblowers & Research*



May 14, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C., 20201

**RE: HHS NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE GRANT**

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

In your new role as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, one of your responsibilities is in managing the National Human Trafficking Hotline, which is funded through a grant from HHS' Administration for Children & Families. Since 2007, HHS has contracted with the Polaris Project to provide this critical public safety service. For this, Polaris has received millions in funding. And now, through a notice of funding posted on January 16, 2025, HHS is once again considering whether to renew this grant to Polaris or to bring on a new partner to run the hotline. The deadline for grant applications is May 30, 2025.<sup>1</sup>

However, on May 5, 2025, it was revealed in a letter to you from Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley that a whistleblower represented by Empower Oversight has made protected disclosures to Congress revealing deep and systemic problems with how Polaris has administered the program to date.<sup>2</sup> Examples of the problems are included in Chairman Grassley's letter. And as the letter notes, additional complaints over Polaris have come from bipartisan coalitions of large numbers of state Attorneys General who sent letters in 2023 and 2025.<sup>3</sup> The whistleblower information in Chairman Grassley's letter reveals that the problems run deeper than even the Attorneys General were aware. The Attorneys General were concerned over a lack of reporting to local law enforcement of tips from third parties about the sex trafficking of adult victims. But the whistleblower information reveals that at least in some instances, even information concerning the sex trafficking of minors is not being reported. The problem is widespread and alarming.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/355255>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley to hhs - national human trafficking hotline.pdf](https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley%20to%20hhs%20-%20national%20human%20trafficking%20hotline.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.naag.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/State-Attorney-General-Letter-to-Congress-Polaris.pdf>;  
[https://www.naag.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.naag.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/National-Human-Trafficking-Hotline_FINAL.pdf).

In light of these issues, only revealed to the public for the first time last week, we request that you reopen and extend the deadline for applications for the grant to run the hotline. This is necessary in order that additional qualified applicants can have an opportunity to apply to replace Polaris, and thereby to give HSS a meaningful choice as it processes and considers the deeply troubling whistleblower information regarding Polaris's administration of the hotline.

Additional scrutiny is warranted here, and not just because of the whistleblower. As Chairman Grassley noted, Polaris co-founder Katherine Chon may have potential oversight of this grant award as Director of HHS's Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP). HSS must assure that it moves forward with the grant process free of any conflicts of interest to ensure program integrity and to see that the best qualified applicant receives the grant going forward.

HSS's administration of the hotline grant is critical to helping local and federal law enforcement to combat the scourge of human trafficking. In your position as Secretary we ask that you make ensuring that the hotline is well run to meet its statutory objectives one of your top priorities.

Helpfully, the President's nominee for General Counsel at HHS has experience fighting human trafficking and can assist you with this task once he is confirmed. Reopening and extending the deadline for applications to run the hotline would give him time to come on board and put his experience to work to help you chart a path for the hotline going forward.

We understand that you have many responsibilities and are moving aggressively to implement the President's Make America Healthy Again agenda. At the same time, the issues with Polaris revealed by the whistleblower and the letters from the Attorneys General cry out for your attention and consideration. By reopening and extending the deadline, you can buy time to see that a full and adequate deliberation, with your own personal involvement as needed, can occur.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Cordially,

/Tristan Leavitt/  
Empower Oversight  
President

cc: The Honorable Charles Grassley  
Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Juliet T. Hodgkins  
Acting Inspector General  
Department of Health and Human Services