

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

NEWS RELEASES

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Compliance**Professional**

CYNTHIA L. CORDES
KANSAS CITY:
816.983.8000
CYNTHIA.CORDES@
HUSCHBLACKWELL.COM

Husch Blackwell Launches Human Trafficking Legal Clinic, the First of its Kind in the Country

Husch Blackwell has committed to represent *all* victims of human trafficking referred to the firm by the U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Missouri. The district has prosecuted more human trafficking cases than any other district in the United States. The clinic includes representation of both international and domestic victims, adults and children, of commercial sex and forced labor trafficking cases. The human trafficking legal clinic will be based out of the firm's Kansas City, Mo., office.

"This initiative marks an unprecedented dedication of pro bono work for human trafficking victims from a private-sector law firm," said Jennifer L. Schwendemann, Husch Blackwell's director of pro bono services. "Through this special collaboration with federal law enforcement, we're able to better serve victims of human trafficking and protect vulnerable individuals."

Spearheading the effort is Husch Blackwell Partner Cynthia L. Cordes. As a former assistant U.S. attorney for the Western District of Missouri for almost a decade, she prosecuted more human trafficking cases than any other assistant U.S. attorney in the country. During her years of service with the U.S. Department of Justice, Cordes launched and led a human trafficking task force known as the Human Trafficking Rescue Project. It consisted of more than 20 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and more than 60 nonprofit agencies that provided victim services. The task force functions as a model for other districts in the United States. In 2011, the Western District of Missouri launched and began leading a formal partnership with the District of Kansas and the Eastern District of Missouri, and was selected as one of the U.S. Attorney General's Anti-Trafficking Coordination Teams.

“By representing victims for their personal legal needs, the U.S. Attorney’s Office and law enforcement can best maximize their resources to focus on the criminal prosecution against the traffickers,” said Cordes. “We are thrilled to serve in a supportive role of their ongoing work to take down the traffickers victimizing the most vulnerable in our community.”

Husch Blackwell has a prior history of representing victims recovered in the course of Cordes’ prosecutions, including, *United States v. Liu*, the Taiwanese government official prosecuted for trafficking her own housekeepers, and *United States v. Askarkhodjaev, et al (Giant Labor Solutions)*, the organized crime ring led by foreign nationals from Uzbekistan who exploited the H2-B visa program to traffic workers into the United States for forced labor in motels and hotels.

“Husch Blackwell was extraordinary to work with during my federal prosecutions,” Cordes said. “Their support of our law enforcement investigations was invaluable. The firm’s resource commitment to a formal and expanded program now speaks to the quality of the law firm and the character of the attorneys who work here.”

Partnering with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Husch Blackwell will now serve as a member of the victim services wing of the human trafficking task force, the Human Trafficking Rescue Project, the federal task force that Cordes initiated in 2006. More than 30 attorneys at the firm, including associates and partners, have volunteered to participate in the program. Because Husch Blackwell is a full-service firm, there will not be a legal need of a victim that goes unmet.

In addition, Husch Blackwell will provide training to the law enforcement community on topics of human trafficking and offer training and representation to businesses on government compliance issues, including those relating to labor and immigration regulations.

Husch Blackwell has a long-standing commitment to providing pro bono legal services to individuals, public service groups and charitable organizations that are unable to pay for the legal representation they need.