

# House Passes Bills Aimed at Stemming Human Trafficking

By [JENNIFER STEINHAUER](#) MAY 20, 2014

Tuesday passed a package of bills aimed at stemming human trafficking, an issue that has slowly begun to gain national attention.

The measures passed easily with bipartisan support, and versions of many of them already await consideration on the Senate floor. According to the Justice Department, [as many as 300,000 children](#) may become victims of commercial sexual exploitation each year in the United States.

One measure addresses what many law enforcement experts say is among the most urgent problems in prosecuting sex trafficking — the arrest of victims of forced prostitution, rather than customers or pimps. The [Stop Exploitation Through Trafficking Act](#) would encourage states to offer victims social and protective services, rather than prosecution, and provide job opportunities through the federal Job Corps program.

Another measure seeks to shut down online sexual service advertisements by amending current United States laws in a way that does not run afoul of the First Amendment, something that has stymied similar legislation in states.

One of the bills, also emulated in the Senate, would try to stem the exploitation of children in the child welfare system who are often targeted by pimps; another would notify foreign governments when Americans convicted of the sexual abuse of a minor travel abroad; and the [Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act](#) would invest in services to aid victims of sexual trafficking.

While an interest in human trafficking has long been a focus of conservatives, the issue has attracted significant bipartisan interest in recent months. Representative Eric Cantor, Republican of Virginia and the House majority leader, held a news conference on Tuesday to push the legislation, an usual amount of attention for low-profile measures. (Though the legislation had broad support from Democrats, none attended the news conference, and some expressed concern that one measure would lead to mandatory minimum sentencing for a newly proposed offense.)

Mr. Cantor, who has been looking to move legislative focus in the House away from fiscal issues, has taken an interest in human trafficking as other members have presented him with data demonstrating the broad scope of the problem and its impact on a vast array of communities. The House has assembled a working group to keep focus on the issue.

“Many of these victims represent the most vulnerable people on earth,” Mr. Cantor said Tuesday on the House floor, “including individuals with mental disabilities and children stolen from their

homes and taken from their loving moms and dads, with very little chance of ever seeing their families again.”

Several senators from both parties are hoping to pass similar legislation soon, amid hope that a rare compromise with the House is in the offing, potentially producing some of the most significant legislation on this issue in years.

“There is a strong interest in getting these done in the Senate,” said Senator Amy Klobuchar, Democrat of Minnesota, whose bill would require states to treat child prostitutes as victims rather than as criminal defendants. “I am sure we can reach a compromise. Human trafficking is the third-largest criminal enterprise in the world, and the reason there is so much interest in these bills is because 83 percent of the victims are from our country.”