PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

JULIE ABRAHAM

Director, Office of International Transportation and Trade, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation

Julie Abraham leads the Department's international transportation and trade program, shaping multimodal policy, advancing trade promotion and cross-border transportation, and overseeing international technical assistance. She represents the Department in trade negotiations and in bilateral and multilateral transportation organizations worldwide. Since 2012, Ms. Abraham has led the Department's counter-trafficking initiative, directing a team of experts to strengthen DOT's role in combating human trafficking. As Chief Travel and Tourism Officer, she also advances the Department's travel and tourism priorities and guides its strategic plan for transportation infrastructure. From 2009 to 2010, Abraham served as Transportation Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. She led a team drawn from the Departments of Transportation and State, the U.S. military, and locally employed Iraqi staff in helping Iraq build capacity across all modes of transportation. Abraham served as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Director of International Policy, Fuel Economy and Consumer Programs from 2003 to 2009 and again from 2010 to 2011. She directed domestic regulatory programs for automobile fuel economy, consumer labeling, and theft prevention and modernized the structure and standard-setting methodology of the 30-year-old fuel economy program. She also led NHTSA's work to harmonize motor vehicle safety regulations globally through the United Nations. She was appointed to the Senior Executive Service in 2005.

MAHA ALKHATEEB

Senior Counter-Trafficking Advisor, Office of International Transportation and Trade, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation

Maha Alkhateeb has helped shape the transportation sector's response to human trafficking since 2016 by engaging Federal, State, and local stakeholders to bolster policies, partnerships, and public awareness efforts. Leading the Department's Counter-Trafficking Initiative, Internal Counter-Trafficking Steering Committee, and Transportation Leaders Against Human Trafficking (TLAHT), she has equipped the sector to disrupt trafficking through tailored awareness campaigns, modal resources, and a major events readiness roadmap. In addition, she co-developed the TLAHT training for 55,000 USDOT employees and the broader transportation sector, and the USDOT/DHS Blue Lightning Initiative training. Alkhateeb developed the transportation sector's first common data standard for reporting suspected human trafficking, which was incorporated into the National Human Trafficking Hotline to allow for cross-sector data comparison. As the USDOT Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking's Designated Federal Officer, she facilitated its establishment and supports its triennial reports to Congress. Internationally, she served as the principal drafter of multilateral strategies for the U.N. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation and co-developed the sector's first supply chain due diligence tool and ICAO's supply chain guidelines. Previously, she co-led a national domestic violence prevention nonprofit, conducted research on immigrant civic incorporation at Catholic University, and managed an international arts festival. She holds a Master of Arts in sociology from The George Washington University.

HILARY AXAM

Senior Counsel for Combating Human Trafficking, Criminal Division, Human Rights & Special Prosecution Section, U.S. Department of Justice

Hilary Axam has served as Acting Director of the Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit in the Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division since 2009. She has been a prosecutor with the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division since 2001, and a Special Litigation Counsel in the Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit since its inception in 2007. Axam has prosecuted and supervised some of the most significant human trafficking cases in the United States, involving both forced labor and sex trafficking. In 2006, she and the team from United States v. Carreto received the Executive Office of United States Attorneys' Director's Award for securing fifty-year sentences against members of a notorious international sex trafficking ring that forced young Mexican women into prostitution. Axam has trained prosecutors, Federal agents, law enforcement officers, non-governmental organizations, and international delegations on human trafficking laws and investigative and prosecutorial strategies, and has been recognized as one of the DOJ's leading experts on human trafficking. Before coming to the Department, Axam worked internationally as counsel to the Judiciary of the Republic of Palau, and as a Fulbright Fellow at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg, South Africa.

MICHAEL CESTARE

Acting Division Chief for Programs, Center for Countering Human Trafficking, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Michael Cestare currently serves as the Acting Division Chief for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT) over the Programs Division. The Programs Division encompasses the Training and Victim Protection Unit as well as the Outreach and Engagement Unit, which includes the Blue Campaign. Prior to coming to CCHT, Cestare previously served as an Assistant Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Atlanta, Georgia, overseeing multiple investigative disciplines including human trafficking investigations as well as overseeing the HSI Atlanta International Airport investigative group. Cestare began his Federal law enforcement career in 2009 as a Special Agent with HSI Dallas assigned to the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. Cestare graduated from the University of Central Florida with a Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice.

KATHERINE CHON

Director, Office on Trafficking in Persons, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Katherine Chon is the director of the Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP) and senior advisor on human trafficking at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). OTIP is part of the HHS Administration for Children and Families, responsible for developing strategies and implementing programs to prevent trafficking, increase victim identification and access to services, and strengthen the health and well-being of survivors. OTIP also collaborates with government and nongovernment partners to raise public awareness, identify research priorities, and inform policy recommendations to strengthen the Nation’s response to human trafficking. Chon serves on multiple Federal working groups on human trafficking, violence against women, child exploitation, and resilient supply chains. She is the Federal executive officer of public-private collaborations, including the National Advisory Committee on the Trafficking of

Children and Youth in the U.S. and the Joint Forced Labor Working Group. Chon received a Master of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University and a Master of Public Administration from Harvard Kennedy School.

AYN DUCAO

Senior Counsel, Criminal Division, Human Rights & Special Prosecutions Section, U.S. Department of Justice

HRSP serves as the Department of Justice's subject matter experts in human trafficking offenses involving forced labor, sex trafficking, and related coercion-based trafficking crimes. Ducao's portfolio covers the robust non-litigation human trafficking portfolio and recently served as one of the co-chairs to the Anti-Human Trafficking Subcommittee of the FIFA World Cup Task Force. Ducao served as the Deputy Director for Policy and Programs at the Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit (HTPU) until HTPU's merger into HRSP in November 2025. She spent almost thirteen years at the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland where her roles included Executive Assistant United States Attorney, Human Trafficking Coordinator and Chair of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force. As an AUSA, she prosecuted a variety of cases ranging from human trafficking, child exploitation, narcotics trafficking, identity theft, and marriage fraud. But her most personally significant trial was the conviction of a sex trafficker who trafficked a developmentally challenged sixteen-year-old child as well as other adult victims.

DANIEL EDWARDS

Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs, U.S. Department of Transportation

In Daniel J. Edward's vital role, he is responsible for shaping and implementing policies that impact the economic health and international competitiveness of the U.S. aviation industry and broader transportation sector. Edwards has dedicated his career to the aerospace and defense industries. His accomplishments have landed him atop diverse organizations spanning the public, private, and military space. Prior to joining USDOT, he served as CEO of privately held businesses in aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO), as well as supply chain and distribution. Edwards also has extensive business leadership in airborne Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) and airfield infrastructure. He was part of the team that worked closely with FAA to develop and commercialize Engineered Materials Arresting System (EMAS), which protects commercial runways across the US and internationally against aircraft runway overruns. Edwards served over 23 years in the USAF and USAF Reserves as both a KC-10 pilot and airfield civil engineer. He has flown over 100 combat missions, holds type ratings in the DC-10 and 757/767, and has accumulated over 4,000 flight hours as both a military and commercial pilot.

SAMEER JAIN

Member, U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking

Sameer Jain is a native of India. He advocates for a scientific and a data-driven approach towards prevention, identification, prosecution, protection, rehabilitation, and assistance in cases of labor and sex trafficking. A subject matter expert on labor trafficking, he has spoken at various governmental and non-governmental organizations on the subject of trafficking and aims to focus on cases involving individuals/groups of people moved to the United States through legal

channels. He wants to increase awareness at the Federal, State, and local government levels as well as leverage and engage faith-based and ethnic minority-serving organizations to increase public awareness about trafficking. Jain moved to the United States on a visa for specialty occupations, spending all his life previously in a white-collar profession. Despite his social, educational, and financial background, he lived through the horrific experience of trafficking. Instead of pushing him into the corner, this horrific episode made him determined to play a lifelong role in combating trafficking. He is appointed by the President of the United States of America to the prestigious United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking. The Council provides a formal platform for trafficking survivors to advise and make recommendations on Federal anti-trafficking policies to the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF). Jain also serves on the board of Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center which is a coordinator and service provider for victims, survivors, and those who are at-risk of Human Trafficking in the 2nd Judicial Circuit of Florida.

TARA RATZ

Project Safe Childhood and Human Trafficking Coordinator, Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys, U.S. Department of Justice

Tara Ratz joined the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys – Legal Programs in December 2025 and is currently serving as the national Project Safe Childhood and Human Trafficking Coordinator. Ratz is an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Middle District of Alabama, where she most recently served as the PSC and Human Trafficking Coordinator for that district. Ratz joined the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Alabama in 2022 and has significant experience prosecuting child exploitation and human trafficking cases. She has also conducted extensive training for Federal, State, and local law enforcement officers throughout the district. Prior to joining the U.S. Attorney's Office, she served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Criminal Trials Division of the Alabama Attorney General's Office, Special Victims Unit. She also served as an Assistant District Attorney in two District Attorneys' offices in Alabama. Ratz received her undergraduate degree from Auburn University and her law degree from Faulkner University, Thomas Goode Jones School of Law.

TIFFANY TAYLOR

Executive Director, Call Center Operations, Compass Connections

Compass Connections is a national nonprofit dedicated to protecting children, strengthening families, and supporting individuals in crisis through trauma-informed services. She leads operations for the National Human Trafficking Hotline, funded by the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

With more than 20 years of experience in crisis response, victim services, and mission-critical contact center operations, she has led programs supporting human trafficking response, behavioral health, child welfare, and emergency management. Prior to joining Compass Connections, Taylor served as Director of the Victim Services Division for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). She holds a Master of Public Administration and bachelor's degrees in criminal justice and sociology from Tarleton State University.

CICELY WATERS

Director, Office of Communications, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation

As Director, Cicely leads communications strategy and stakeholder engagement to advance commercial motor vehicle safety. Prior to joining the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), Cicely was Director, Office of External Affairs, at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, overseeing the divisions of communications, stakeholder engagement, and congressional affairs for the agency responsible for the nation's medical and public health preparedness, response, and recovery, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Cicely served as Director, Crisis and Incident Communications for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with oversight of the National Joint Information Center and Emergency Support Function 15 within the nation's National Response Framework. Her work at DHS directly supported the Department's Blue Campaign, and she continues supporting Human Trafficking Prevention efforts in her current role at FMCSA. A decorated U.S. Air Force officer and combat veteran with more than 25 years of federal service, Cicely earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Grambling State University and a master's degree in organic chemistry from Tulane University.