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Susan Quinn, Director

May 13, 2014

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **From her own experiences: Tuckerton author speaks about human trafficking horrors**

**TOMS RIVER** - In 1992, at the age of 14, Holly Smith was lured from her safe environment of Tuckerton to Atlantic County where she was forced into prostitution as a victim of sex trafficking.

Smith presented a frank discussion about the growing problem of human trafficking on a global, national and local level during her program on May 6, at the Toms River branch.

The young author wrote the book “Walking Prey” which detailed her story of being a victim of human trafficking. Human trafficking is modern-day slavery whose victims include men, women and children of all ages and ethnicity. It is also a first-degree crime with a penalty of 20 years to life in prison.

There are two types of human trafficking: labor trafficking, where people are forced to work for no pay; and sex trafficking.

Because of its geographical location, New Jersey has the potential to be a major entry, transit and destination for human trafficking.

“I was looking for someone to acknowledge me,” Smith told the audience of around 50 people. She said she was at a mall with friends when she saw a man observing her. “He picked me out of the crowd and gave me his phone number.”

Smith read several passages from her book noting how the man who she came to know as Gregg had skillfully spoken to her. “He was charismatic and he talked to me like an adult.”

“He told me everything I wanted to hear. My world outside of Tuckerton was limited to what I saw on MTV,” Smith said. Gregg later convinced her to run away from home.

“It took me 15 years to find out that the person I spoke to on the phone was a different guy from the one I met at the mall,” Smith said. “I was a 14-year-old girl with a 14-year-old view of the world.”

Smith said that within hours of running away from home and meeting with Gregg she was forced into prostitution in Atlantic City. She said that after escaping that life she wanted to “use my story to talk to people about human trafficking which can happen anywhere.”

“My story is different than others. Every victim’s story is different,” Smith said. She showed a video presentation which focused on the individual stories of human trafficking victims living in other countries, in the United States and in New Jersey.

Smith spoke about a U.S. measure aimed at attacking the problem of human trafficking.

In January the Ocean County Library presented programs about human trafficking at its Long Beach Island and Toms River branches in observance of National Human Trafficking Awareness Day held on Jan. 11.

According to information provided by the NJ Human Trafficking Task Force nearly half (46%) of human trafficking involves prostitution. One-quarter (27%) involves domestic servitude. Ten percent involves agriculture while 5 % involves forced factory work.

It is estimated between 14,500 and 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States each year. Fifty percent of people trafficked into the US each year are children and 800,000 people are trafficked worldwide each year.

New Jersey recently passed a stringent new law that will aid law enforcement in the apprehension and conviction of those caught engaging in it. A website has been created by the state’s Human Trafficking Task Force to educate the public in ways to identify and help victims. For information visit <http://www.nj.gov/oag/dcj/humantrafficking/>