



Legislation Text

File #: RES 12-1296, **Version:** 1

Calling on Village Voice Media to shut down the adult section of its online classified site, Backpage.com, because it serves as a platform to traffic minors for sex.

WHEREAS, according to the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, human trafficking is defined as the "recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person to perform labor or a commercial sex act through force, fraud, or coercion;" and

WHEREAS, in addition, according to the United States Department of Justice ("DOJ"), the TVPA further states that "any commercial sex act performed by a person under age 18 is considered human trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion is involved;" and

WHEREAS, a DOJ Office of Justice Programs (OJP) December 2011 Fact Sheet on Human Trafficking States that as many as 300,000 children are at risk for sexual exploitation each year in the United States; and

WHEREAS, according to data compiled both by The Advocates for Human Rights and the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, the scope of sex trafficking sex in Minnesota, includes the following:

- Over a three year period ending in 2008, service providers identified 731 sex trafficking victims;
- 124 girls were sold on the internet in the month of August 2010 alone, which is a 55% increase since February 2010;
- The average age of a girl's entry into prostitution/sex trafficking is 12 to 14 years old;
- According to one service provider, 8,000 to 12,000 people are estimated to be involved in prostitution/sex trafficking in Minnesota every day.

WHEREAS, in Ramsey County, the Runaway Intervention Project ("RIP") has gained national attention as a best results oriented model for working with teen runaways of girls 15 and younger, including teen girls who have been prostituted. The Juvenile Division of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office ("RCAO") refers those girls who have been prostituted to the intensive services component of RIP at Midwest Children's Resource Center. The RCAO has found that using a victim-centered public health model with this population- rather than treating them as delinquents - provides an environment for children who have been trafficked as prostitutes to rebuild their self esteem, their family life, and their future. In 2011, the number of girls referred to RIP who have been victimized by being trafficked was 24; and

WHEREAS, one vehicle used to exploit and "market" such victims is online advertising for "adult services" and

WHEREAS, after news reports linking Craigslist adult advertising to crimes that included sex trafficking and murder, and after much public pressure and a letter signed by 17 states' attorneys general, Craigslist banned sexually related advertising in September 2010; and

WHEREAS, according to a *New York Times* article entitled "Fighting Over Online Sex Ads," once Craigslist discontinued such advertising, a large amount of the approximately \$44 million in sex-related advertising went to Backpage.com; and

WHEREAS, the Saint Paul Police Department's Vice/Human Trafficking Unit along with the Gerald D. Vick

Human Trafficking Task Force, which investigate all sex trafficking cases in the City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County, report that 99% of those investigations have involved juvenile victims being marketed and "sold" via Backpage.com; and

WHEREAS, Backpage.com and its parent company, Village Voice Media, have been contacted by numerous advocacy groups, law enforcement officials and religious organizations asking them to close the site; and

WHEREAS, a letter to Backpage.com from the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) dated August 31, 2011, states that charges were filed against person who trafficked or attempted to traffic minors using Backpage.com in over 50 instances in 22 states over the course of three years; and

WHEREAS, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office has found that a growing number of the sex trafficking cases prosecuted by that office in the last year involved girls who were "marketed" through Backpage.com; and

WHEREAS, Backpage.com presently refuses to discontinue its adult service section and claims the company monitors it "24/7;" and

WHEREAS, sex trafficking is a heinous crime that must be addressed in the most serious manner possible; and

WHEREAS, to bolster actions by law enforcement, society should assist in eradicating such crimes by adjusting practices to make it more difficult for these criminals to function; and

WHEREAS, Backpage.com's adult section is facilitating sex trafficking and should alter its current practice;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Saint Paul City Council calls on Village Voice Media to shut down the adult section of its online classified site, Backpage.com, because it serves as a platform to traffic minors for sex.