



**Request for City Council Committee Action
from the Department of Intergovernmental Relations**

Date: July 31, 2012

To: Council Member Elizabeth Glidden, Chair, Intergovernmental Relations
Subcommittee and Members of the Committee

Referral to: City Council

Subject: Resolution calling on Village Voice Media to cease publication of the adult section of its online classified section, Backpage.com, as it facilitates the trafficking of minors for sexual exploitation.

Amendment to City of Minneapolis federal legislative agenda to add support for legislation that works to end the sexual exploitation of youth by building a system that responds effectively to their needs, including sufficient resources and training for law enforcement and service providers.

Recommendations:

- a) Approve resolution calling on Village Voice Media to cease publication of the adult section of its online classified section, Backpage.com;
- b) Amend the policy initiative section of the FY 2013 Federal Agenda by adding a statement regarding support for ending sexual exploitation of youth;
- c) Approve direction to staff to report back to the Public Safety, Civil Rights & Health Committee by November 15, 2012, relating to work of the Police Department, City Attorney's office, and other local partners on issue of child prostitution and sex trafficking of minors for sexual exploitation.

Previous Directives: In 2011, the City of Minneapolis amended its state legislative agenda to include support for legislative efforts to end the sexual exploitation of youth by building a system that responds effectively to their needs, including sufficient resources and training for law enforcement and service providers.

Department Information

Prepared by: Melissa Reed, Government Relations Representative, IGR Department

Approved by:

Presenters in Committee:

Financial Impact

No financial impact

Background

In 2011, the City of Minneapolis amended its state legislative agenda to include support for legislative efforts to end the sexual exploitation of youth by building a system that responds effectively to their needs, including sufficient resources and training for law enforcement and service providers.

Amendment to the City's federal legislative agenda is needed because, as the DOJ Office of Justice Programs noted in 2011, as many as 300,000 children are at risk for sexual exploitation each year in the United States. And in Minnesota, the Advocates for Human Rights and the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety estimate that 124 girls were sold on the internet in the month of August 2010 alone, which is a 55% increase since February 2010.

1. **Amendment to the Federal Agenda regarding sexual exploitation of youth.** Minneapolis recommends the following amendment to its policy initiative section of the FY 2013 federal agenda:

Support legislation that works to end the sexual exploitation of youth by building a system that responds effectively to their needs, including sufficient resources and training for law enforcement and service providers.

The United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs noted in 2011, as many as 300,000 children are at risk for sexual exploitation each year in the United States. And in Minnesota, the Advocates for Human Rights and the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety estimate that 124 girls were sold on the internet in the month of August 2010 alone, which is a 55% increase since February 2010.

Federal legislation such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), the Mann Act, and the PROTECT Act are the primary federal policies regarding human trafficking. The TVPA was authorized in 2000 and has been reauthorized three times. However the TVPA expired in September 2011. Legislation has been introduced that would extend the Act but it has not passed. The Mann Act makes it a felony to knowingly transport any person in interstate or foreign commerce for prostitution, or for any sexual activity for which a person can be charged with a criminal offense. This law is frequently used as an effective tool to prosecute sex traffickers. The PROTECT Act was enacted in 2003 to combat the sexual exploitation of children. Among other things, the Act requires courts to impose mandatory sentences for sex offenders and makes it a crime to travel abroad to engage in sexual conduct with minors. The Act amends the criminal code to increase supervision of convicted sex offenders for specific felonies. In addition, the Act creates minimum standards and grants for states to expand their Amber Alert system for missing children.

2. **Resolution calling on Village Voice to cease publication of the adult section of Backpage.com.** In furtherance with this goal, this resolution calls upon Village Voice Media, owner of City Pages, to cease publication of the adult section of its online classified section, Backpage.com, because it facilitates the trafficking of minors for sexual exploitation.



Resolution
Of the
City of Minneapolis

By Glidden

Calling on Village Voice Media to cease publication of the adult section of its online classified section, Backpage.com.

Whereas, In 2011, the City of Minneapolis amended its state legislative agenda to include support for legislative efforts to end the sexual exploitation of youth by building a system that responds effectively to their needs, including sufficient resources and training for law enforcement and service providers; and

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; 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 Minneapolis Police Department reports that all 20 child sex-trafficking cases investigated this year 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, 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 by The City Council of The City of Minneapolis:

That the Minneapolis City Council calls on Village Voice Media to cease publication of the adult section of its online classified section, Backpage.com, because it facilitates the trafficking of minors for sexual exploitation.