



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Catherine Cortez Masto, *Attorney General*

100 N. Carson Street
Carson City, Nevada 89701-4717
Telephone - (775) 684-1100
Fax - (775) 684-1108
Web - <http://ag.state.nv.us>

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Contact: Edie Cartwright
775.684.1189

NEVADA ATTORNEY GENERAL JOINS MULTISTATE LETTER TO DETER ADVERTISING RELATED TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

CARSON CITY, NV: The Office of the Nevada Attorney General announced today that it has joined with 45 other attorneys general in a letter to Backpage.com requesting removal of advertising for adult services which has resulted in instances of sex trafficking, including situations involving minors.

Backpage.com, owned by Village Voice Media, LLC, is the top provider of “adult services” internet advertisements, including advertisements about services available at various cities and towns located within Nevada. The attorneys general allege that the Backpage.com adult service advertisements “are a hub for illegal sex ads and are a magnet for those seeking to exploit minors” and points to more than 50 cases, in 22 states over three years, involving the trafficking or attempted trafficking of minors through Backpage.com.

“These are only the stories that made it into the news; many more instances likely exist,” the attorneys general wrote. They also reminded Backpage.com of a 2010 request from nearly two dozen attorneys general asking that the adult services site be taken down. “Traffickers who exploit runaways and other disadvantaged kids shouldn’t be provided with a tool that makes that process so much easier. The only way for Backpage.com to completely stop child sex trafficking on its site is to take down adult services advertisements altogether and take aggressive steps to be sure such posts don’t appear elsewhere on the site,” the letter stated.

“This is not about prostitution, it is about human trafficking and exploitation of minors” said Attorney General Masto. “It is incredible that any national publication would defend that it has a right to profit from such illegal activities

In many cases involving human trafficking related to Backpage.com advertising, law enforcement finds that minors were coerced and forced into performing sex acts with “customers.”

Village Voice board member Don Moon readily acknowledges prostitution ads appear on the Backpage.com web site. In a June 29 article published nationally by the Village Voice, the corporation criticized those concerned about child sex trafficking as “prohibitionists bent on

ending the world's oldest profession," acknowledging that, as a seller of adult services ads, "Village Voice has a stake in this story."

Industry analysts suggest that Village Voice's stake in adult services advertisements is worth about \$22.7 million in annual revenue. While Backpage.com has ramped up its effort to screen some ads for minors, the attorneys general involved in today's letter believe that "Backpage.com sets a minimal bar for content review in an effort to temper public condemnation, while ensuring that the revenue spigot provided by prostitution advertising remains intact."

The letter from state attorneys general makes a series of requests to Backpage.com to provide evidence to substantiate the claim that the company enforces policies to prevent illegal activity. The attorneys general also ask that Backpage.com to provide how many of those advertisements were individually screened for illegal activity, how many were rejected and how many were removed after being discovered to be for illegal services.

In 2008, 42 attorneys general reached an agreement with Craigslist to crack down on illegal listings, in an effort to reduce crimes like human trafficking. Craigslist ultimately removed its "erotic services" section altogether in May 2009. In September, 2009, 21 attorneys general wrote Backpage.com to request that the adult services section be closed. Backpage.com refused to comply. Attorney General Masto commented: "I hope that Backpage.com takes our requests more seriously this time. Lives literally depend on it."

The states signing on to today's letter are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wyoming and the territory of Guam.