

# SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Michael McGinn  
City of Seattle

DATE: July 1, 2011

FROM: Chief John Diaz   
Seattle Police Department

SUBJECT: Backpage.com

The Seattle Police Department Vice/High Risk Victims Unit believes that Backpage.com and its parent company Village Voice media is not doing enough to combat child prostitution.

The predatory crime of child prostitution has been occurring with alarming frequency in Seattle and throughout the Puget Sound Region of Washington State. Girls are coerced by fraud or threat of violence into a lifestyle that crushes them physically and psychologically. Those lucky enough to escape their traffickers still have to deal with chemical dependency, depression, anger and despair. Many are presented on Backpage.com with everything but a price tag. The profit to Backpage.com for this carte blanche access? Millions of dollars in revenue. The profit to the child victims? Nothing.

In 2011 alone, SPD detectives have uncovered four documented cases of child prostitution openly advertised on the Backpage.com website.

Detectives have worked on these cases to identify and rescue the children in question and to arrest those who have trafficked them.

Backpage.com needs to realize that society will no longer tolerate inaction and ignorance.

Seattle Police detectives ask that Backpage.com monitor its own Web site for suspected child prostitution through age verification. A simple solution would be for Backpage.com to require photo identification when clients submit photo profiles. The Seattle Police Department is willing to work with Backpage.com employees to train them to identify such cases. When cases are discovered that involve child prostitution, detectives request cooperation and assistance from Backpage.com in order to successfully rescue the child victims. Detectives are not asking Backpage.com employees to become agents of the police. Detectives are only asking that they provide a modest amount of cooperation in fighting the social blight of child prostitution.