



# Press Release

Missy Larsen - [missywlarsen@utah.gov](mailto:missywlarsen@utah.gov) - 801-230-9890

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Attorney General Sean Reyes Urges Congressional Support of Legislation to Prevent Online Sex Trafficking of Youth**

### ***Utah's AGO Combats Trafficking Crisis through ICAC and SECURE***

SALT LAKE CITY SALT LAKE CITY Oct. 20, 2014 – Utah's Attorney General Sean D. Reyes today urged members of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee to support legislation that would help prevent children from being trafficked on the Internet. His office's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force and SECURE Strike Force are constantly battling the overwhelming crisis.

Human trafficking is the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world, generating approximately \$150 billion each year. Shockingly, there are numerous cases nationally of children being used in prostitution as young as 12. The FBI estimates that nearly 300,000 American youth are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

"At any given time in our office, we have multiple investigators assigned to cases where children are being exploited and trafficked on the Internet. Although we make many arrests locally, the problem is catastrophically permeating back rooms of the web," said Attorney General Reyes. "We can no longer fight this fight without an interconnected effort with legislators and law enforcement officials, both nationally and internationally."

In a letter co-sponsored by the Indiana and Washington attorneys general, and joined by 51 other attorneys general, General Reyes asked members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for their support of the Stop Advertising Victims of Exploitation Act (SAVE) Act (S. 2536), which would provide more oversight of websites that facilitate "adult services," such as Backpage.com.

Attorney General Reyes is urging our national leaders to act now as the federal courts have recognized the Internet as a favored means for advertising the availability of children for sex. Internet ads can be purchased in multiple locations with the click of a button.

Such activities and access allows human traffickers to maximize their profit and evade detection by moving victims quickly to lucrative venues where there is significant demand for commercial sex. The plea to Congress points out that organized crime groups and street gangs use the Internet to sell their victims as well, which is why passage of the SAVE Act is particularly critical.

The use of the “adult services sections” on websites such as Backpage.com has created virtual brothels where children are bought and sold using euphemistic labels such as “escorts.” The SAVE Act would require these websites that are facilitating trafficking through their very business model to take steps to verify the identity of individuals posting advertisements and the age of those who appear in these advertisements.

In one week this past June, law enforcement arrested 281 alleged sex traffickers and took 168 children out of prostitution in a nationwide FBI crackdown where many child victims were offered for sale on “escort” and other “adult services” websites. In Utah, the Attorney General’s Office works with statewide law enforcement to battle sex trafficking. This past year, the office has and continues to investigate persons involved in human trafficking for forced labor and forced commercial sex. Recently, the AGO completed the investigation and prosecution of Victor Manuel Rax. The Attorney General’s SECURE Strike Force identified over forty male child victims ages 9-15 who were trafficked in drug distribution and sexually abused by the trafficker Victor Manuel Rax. Overall, the Attorney General’s SECURE Strike Force was involved in the investigation and/or arrest of 36 targets of human trafficking.

Preventing kids from being trafficked on the Internet has been a long-term interest of the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG). NAAG has taken several actions regarding Backpage.com and similar websites, including requesting that these exploitive websites shut down their “adult services” sections which fuel the online trafficking of youth.

The states and territories that signed today’s letter are: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming.

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