



## Press Releases

August 31, 2011

### **ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN CALLS ON BACKPAGE.COM TO BAN ADS SOLICITING SEX TRAFFICKING**

Chicago — Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and 45 other states today raised concerns about Internet classified ad company Backpage.com's efforts to block and remove ads that solicit sex, especially ones that could involve minors. Despite the company's claims of strict policies to prevent such ads, attorneys general continue to find hundreds of ads clearly soliciting illegal services.

The attorneys general allege Backpage.com is a magnet for those seeking to exploit and coerce minors into illegal acts. In one such case, teenage girls say they were threatened and extorted by two adults who marketed them on Backpage.com. One of the adults rented a hotel room and forced the girls to have sex with men who answered the online ads. Backpage.com charges \$1 and up for such ads.

"The policies Backpage.com claims it has in place obviously are not working," said Attorney General Madigan. "We will not tolerate the sale of human beings and the exploitation of children. The only way for Backpage.com to completely stop child sex trafficking on its site is to eliminate the adult services advertisements and take aggressive steps to prohibit such posts elsewhere on the site."

Today's letter from the attorneys general asks Backpage.com to provide detailed information to substantiate its claim that the company enforces policies to prevent illegal activity. The attorneys general ask that Backpage.com describe in detail how many advertisements in its adult section and subsections have been submitted since Sept. 1, 2010, how many of those advertisements were individually screened, how many were rejected and how many were removed after being discovered to be for illegal services.

Madigan and other state attorneys general opened an investigation into Backpage.com in 2009. The company responded with attempts to address the concerns, including implementing fees to place ads in the adult services section. Those efforts failed, however, and in September 2010, Attorney General Madigan and 20 other state attorneys general urged Backpage.com to immediately eliminate the adult services advertisements from its site to prevent human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and women.

Madigan joined attorneys general from Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, 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 in sending the letter to Backpage.com today.

The action is part of Attorney General Madigan's ongoing work to protect the children and women who fall victim to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Craigslist and Backpage.com are two of the country's largest online classified ad sites. Craigslist ultimately removed its "erotic services" section in May 2009. In August 2010, Madigan successfully lead the effort to force Craigslist to also remove its adult services section.

In addition, Madigan launched Operation Glass House in August 2010 to seek out and arrest the worst child pornographers viewing and trading child pornography online in Illinois. On the first anniversary of the initiative last week, she announced the 25th and 26th arrests and laid out plans to focus year two of Operation Glass House on targeting offenders trading extremely violent videos of children – often infants and toddlers – being raped.

Madigan also works with local and national law enforcement organizations to address Internet exploitation issues. Madigan's office, with a grant from the federal Department of Justice, runs the Illinois Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task force, which investigates child exploitation crimes and trains law enforcement. Since 2006, Madigan's ICAC task force has been involved in 374

arrests of sexual predators and provided Internet safety training and education to more than 169,000 parents, teachers and students and more than 12,000 law enforcement professionals.

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