



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: June 1, 2011 REPORT NO. 11-083
ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee
Agenda of June 8, 2011
SUBJECT: Informational Report from the San Diego Police Department
Regarding Domestic Human Trafficking and Pimping

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CITY COUNCIL.

BACKGROUND

Human sex trafficking is one of the most horrific crimes committed in our society today. It involves the recruitment, abduction, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under 18 years of age. In other words, human beings are being bought and sold repeatedly for profit.

Sex traffickers prey on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society. Homeless and runaway youth are especially vulnerable to domestic minor sex trafficking. Nationally, 450,000 children run away from home each year. One out of every 3 teens on the street will be lured toward prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home. Statistically, this means at least 150,000 children are lured into prostitution each year.

In recent years, law enforcement throughout the nation has noted a significant increase in the number of gang members who have engaged in pimping and pandering. Criminal street gangs have embraced pimping as a major source of funding for their gangs, rivaling even narcotic sales. Pimps and pimping gangs are recruiting from high schools, middle schools, shopping malls, bus and trolley stops, and the internet. They often use the same tactics of fear, manipulation, and coercion to tear victims away from their family or school and into a life of prostitution.

ENFORCEMENT:

The San Diego Police Department's Vice Unit detectives are members of San Diego Regional Anti-Trafficking Task Force (SDRATTF). Law enforcement from the San Diego Sheriff's Department, the City of Carlsbad, Chula Vista, Coronado, El Cajon, Escondido, La Mesa, National City, and Oceanside Police Department are also committed members who provide investigative and

administrative support for identified human trafficking cases. Prosecution of pimping, pandering and human trafficking cases is handled by the San Diego County District Attorney or the U.S. Attorney's Office as appropriate. Two of our Vice detectives and a Vice sergeant, are also members of the FBI's Innocence Lost Task Force.

Because the San Diego Police Department maintains the only full-time dedicated Vice Unit in the County, we are on the front line aggressively enforcing prostitution, pimping and pandering laws. Our proactive efforts to locate and rescue trafficking victims via the Internet, social networking sites, and on the streets is a key factor in the increase of trafficking cases and arrests. During Fiscal Year 2010, Vice had 27 open pimping cases. In just the last quarter alone, Vice opened 19 new pimping cases.

Arrests of human traffickers and pimps have remained a top priority. In the last two years, arrests of documented gang members for pimping or pandering increased by 25% in San Diego. Our law enforcement partners nationwide have also noted this new trend involving gang members and pimping cases. The high profits and low risks of "selling" young girls and women have even broken down barriers between enemy gangs, which were well-documented in the recent federal indictment and arrest of Oceanside gang members. Many of their victims were underage females who had been recruited or coerced in the pimping game by gang members or associates. School administrators have also documented and reported numerous cases of active recruitment by gang members in or around their campuses.

Sex trafficking cases are both labor and time intensive as the victims remain fearful of their pimps and are reluctant to cooperate in a criminal investigation. Many times, the victims return to their pimps after being rescued from the streets by law enforcement. Fear, coercion, lack of job skills and other personal issues are huge obstacles for the victims to overcome. Regardless of their desire to prosecute, each victim is offered and provided temporary housing and services for their health and welfare needs. The paradigm shift from the incarceration (punishment) to the rescue and rehabilitation of sex trafficking victims has been both successful and rewarding.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Vice Unit, along with members of the SDRATTF, has made a diligent and concerted effort to identify the training needs related to human trafficking crimes within San Diego. We have worked closely with other task force members, service providers and non-governmental organizations to facilitate the training of law enforcement personnel in the identification of potential human trafficking victims, procedures for referral of victims to service provider organizations, and the techniques for successful investigation of complex human trafficking cases.

In addition to training law enforcement, the Vice Unit has provided training to probation and parole agents, Child Welfare Services case workers, school administrators, school counselors, nurses, school boards and several other community groups such as the NAACP and Project Ujima. Since January 2010, we have trained over 2,600 citizens on the warning signs for victims of sex trafficking. An increased awareness and knowledge of this growing problem has certainly led to the increase in reporting of suspected sex trafficking cases.

LEGISLATION

On November 9, 2010, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors unanimously supported AB 918, which would strengthen penalties for crimes related to human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Adding pimping-related crimes to the legal definition of a street gang triggers tougher penalties, higher bail, affects probation and parole conditions, augments law enforcement tools, and affects the way the case is handled by all stakeholders in the system.

STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

Our success in the rescue of human trafficking victims, along with the paradigm shift away from incarceration, has created new challenges. Sex trafficking victims have endured significant emotional and physical trauma and need access to short-term and long-term recovery and treatment programs. Countywide, very few “beds” are available for these victims, especially those girls who are underage and homeless.

In February 2010, SDPD Vice met with members of the Regional Continuum of Care Council (RCC) of the Housing Commission to discuss housing strategies and alternatives for these youth. A committee is being developed within RCC to explore possible funding sources for long-term housing that is critical to the success of long-term treatment and recovery programs for victims.

Another exciting development is the creation of a “Human Trafficking Resource Guide” that includes information about reporting, research, education and advocacy. Members of the SDRATTF identified the need to create this handout based on feedback from attendees at the human trafficking presentations. Citizens have clearly demonstrated a desire to become active in their communities at every level to address this problem. The Resource Guide will provide them an important “one stop shop” for resources and reporting information.

And finally, additional training programs need to be developed and provided to parents and students regarding the warning signs of human trafficking victims. This training is key to protecting our youth from this crime and to instilling and supporting the value of human life and dignity.

CONCLUSION

The San Diego Police Department’s Vice Unit has been recognized throughout the County as a leader in the fight against sex trafficking. Our participation in the San Diego Regional Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force and the Innocence Lost Task Force has enhanced our ability to locate and rescue trafficking victims and arrest their pimps. Our partnerships with the non-governmental organizations, educators and faith based groups have provided us with the tools and resources to train educators, service providers, citizens and the community.

Respectfully submitted,



William M. Laisdowne
Chief of Police