



AG STRANGE URGES CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT TO PREVENT ONLINE SEX TRAFFICKING OF YOUTH

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Luther Strange today urged members of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee to support legislation that would help prevent children from being trafficked on the internet.

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

"The great tragedy is while human trafficking is a pervasive and fast-growing crime, it is often undetected," said Attorney General Strange. "Victims may go unrecognized and not even realize that what is being done to them is illegal or that they can ever escape. Victims are isolated from those who might help them, and trapped in a terrifying web of violence, intimidation and control. We are asking Congress to pass legislation that would help in breaking this web and freeing its victims."

In a letter co-sponsored by the Indiana and Washington attorneys general, and joined by 53 attorneys general, Attorney General Strange asked members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for their support of the Stop Advertising Victims of Exploitation (SAVE) Act (S. 2536), which would provide more oversight of websites that facilitate "adult services," such as Backpage.com.

Attorney General Strange said federal courts have recognized that the internet has become 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. This 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. Attorney General Strange said 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.

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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 business model to take steps to verify the identity of individuals posting advertisements and the age of those who appear in these advertisements.

In just one week this 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.

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.