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## COUNCIL HEARS TESTIMONY ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Written by **Eric Mayes** | Thursday, 13 December 2012 18:50 | font size | Print | 1 comment

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More than 200 women — sex slaves — are for sale on the Internet on a typical day in Philadelphia, according to testimony heard by members of City Council this week during hearings on human trafficking.

"While it may be easy to believe that this does not happen in our city, the truth is, every day in Philadelphia people, mostly women, are being sold on street corners and on the Internet," said Hugh Organ, associate executive director of Covenant House Pennsylvania.

He cited an informal survey by Covenant House, which, on a recent Thursday night, found 230 women for sale in local Internet ads.

By most estimates, including Organ's, 200 is a wildly low number and victims are not just women and young girls. Boys, and less frequently, men are also being traded on street corners and on the Internet across Philadelphia.

Public testimony, at which photographers were prohibited because of the presence of at least one victim, included input from 16 people from law enforcement and advocacy agencies across the city and state.

The most compelling testimony came from a woman who was a victim of trafficking.

"What happened to me was very, very bad," said the woman, who asked to be identified only as Yadira, 28, and spoke through a Spanish interpreter. "I came out of the situation, and I'm not a victim anymore — but even though time has gone by, I can't forget that."

She was arrested in a brothel in Norristown with several women from Mexico and Ecuador. She told council members that she was coerced into prostitution for three or four months before her arrest with threats against her 7-year-old daughter in South America.

"The threats are real threats, and everything has to do with a daughter I have. It's very difficult to understand why a person would do this, but when your children are involved, any woman would do what they have to do to keep their children safe," Yadira said. "They threatened to kidnap my daughter."

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Yadira questioned why she was arrested and her pimps were not.

"We get arrested. In the meantime, the people who do this to us are free," she said. "And they are the ones that should be arrested and locked away."

Like Yadira, most victims are adults. Approximately 1.2 million children are also victims of trafficking. According to testimony, most of the victims in Philadelphia are from the United States.

"It's really a multi-billion dollar industry, and these girls are commodities," said Francina Pendergrass, a nurse.

Officials with the police department and district attorney's office were unable to provide solid numbers. Capt. John Darby, head of the Special Victims Unit, said the department investigates 5,000 cases each year.

The nature of the crime makes statistics hard to come by. Victims are often unaware that they are victims. Many have been brainwashed and conditioned into accepting their role, and isolated to prevent discovery. Even if an individual reports a crime such as rape or sexual assault, it's often difficult tie them into larger human trafficking crimes.

Philadelphia, because of its proximity to Interstate 95, its central location between New York City, Atlantic City and Washington D.C., its international airport and bustling harbor, is poised to become a hub of human trafficking on the East Coast, according to victim advocates.

Council's Committee of Public Safety held the hearings at the prompting of Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown, who said the hearing will allow Council to explore solutions, including legislation and seating a task force, to the problem.

"This is the first chapter of the work that we have to do," she said. "We're going to take all the testimony and review it. Recommendations were made throughout the testimonies, and we'll infuse those recommendations [in our report], and do an inventory of those recommendations. We will convene everyone that gave testimony, and ask them to be a part of a task force to figure out new practices we should adopt."

Though it was too early to discuss possible legislation, public safety chairman Curtis Jones Jr. hinted at his thinking.

"Why aren't we focusing on the individuals who make this whole trade work?" asked Jones, referring to the johns who create the demand for prostitutes.

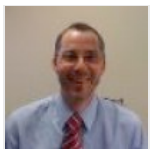
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Eric is a general assignment reporter for The Philadelphia Tribune  
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Decriminalize consenting adult commercial sex so that when us NON sex slave- sex workers see abuse or coercion, we can turn in the abuser. Some say that decriminalizing or legalizing prostitution doesn't stop the violence against women- but, given that marriage is legal and there are over 12 MILLION incidents of intimate partner violence and 1 MILLION intimate partner rapes every year, would it make any sense to criminalize marriage to protect wives and children from abusive spouses and fathers? (yes, there are abusive wives as well) And non commercial consensual sex is not a crime, yet we still have 243,800 (reported in 2011) violent rapes and sexual assaults... would it help ANY of those victims to re-criminalize fornication and arrest EVERYONE who had sex outside of marriage?

The problem is that the abolitionist movement is attempting to eliminate all commercial sex, and in so doing, they are harming the very people they claim to want to help. The scarce and valuable police and justice system resources are being squandered with useless sting operations in which cops occasionally have sex with a 'suspected prostitute.' And then the cops ARREST the 'alleged victim' of sex trafficking. Would we arrest the victims of pedophile coaches? Or all the victims of those pedophile priests? Philadelphia has had its share of pedophile priests and those who covered it up. But you don't arrest ALL priests on the outside chance that SOME of them MAY be pedophiles... and ALL OTHER VICTIMS OF ALL OTHER CRIMES (except homicides, of course) MUST report the crime against them BEFORE the cops will investigate. Is the victim of a violent rape LESS important to society than a consenting adult sex worker who has NOT ASKED FOR HELP?

**Norma Jean Almodovar** Saturday, 15 December 2012 12:04

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