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Indiana trying to combat sex trafficking for Super Bowl

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BY MICHAEL PUENTE | NOV. 23, 2011



(AP photo)

Indiana Attorney General Greg Zoeller.

Super Bowl XLVI is expected to bring thousands of people and millions of dollars to downtown Indianapolis in February. And it's not just for the National Football League's championship game at Lucas Oil Stadium on Feb. 5.

The NFL will put on a week's worth of events leading up to the big game, including autograph sessions with football stars, games, displays and entertainment.

But some are also likely to come to Indy take advantage of a short-lived, but thriving, market for prostitution.

Large conventions or major sporting events such as the Super Bowl often turn into magnets for seedy sideshows and state officials fear this one will be no different.

"The people of Indiana are very proud I believe of the fact that Indianapolis will be hosting this year's Super Bowl but we also have to be realistic," Indiana Attorney General Greg Zoeller said Wednesday. "There will also be some of the problems associated with these types of international sporting events."

Zoeller says many young girls will be transported to Indy for the big game to specifically accommodate demand for such services. That's been the experience, he says, in states that have hosted past Super Bowls and other large sporting events, where organized groups of criminals promote underage prostitution to out-of-town visitors.

Zoeller said the criminals lure impoverished young women and children with promises of jobs in the United States, only to force them into sex work and other labor.

To deal with this, Zoeller wants Indiana lawmakers to pass a comprehensive human trafficking bill shortly after the General Assembly comes together in early January.

"I'm optimistic the Indiana General Assembly can come together in a bi-partisan fashion to pass the human trafficking bill into law so that it'll be on the books before February when we welcome people from around the world to Indianapolis," Zoeller said.

Just last week, Indiana's Criminal Code Evaluation Commission voted 11-1 to recommend closing loopholes in current trafficking laws.

The preliminary bill would make it easier to punish traffickers harshly, by reclassifying trafficking as a Class A felony, the highest category under Indiana criminal law. Under the proposal, a person convicted of selling a child for purposes of prostitution or sexual conduct would serve 20 to 50 years

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in prison.

Indiana's trafficking laws currently apply to only parents or guardians, but the bill would change that. It would also redefine the practice so that prosecutors would not have to prove that force was part of the crime in order to obtain a conviction.

Zoeller's support of the bill is part of a national effort called "Pillars of Hope," which is led by the state of Washington's Attorney General Rob McKenna. That initiative has four goals: holding traffickers accountable; getting communities to care for victims; raising public awareness; and reducing demand.

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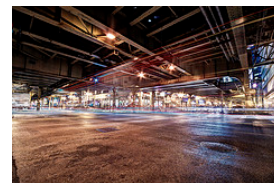


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