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Human trafficking bill heads to Indiana Governor

Decision could come in time for arrival of the Super Bowl.

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MICHAEL PUENTE | JAN. 30, 2012

A bill to toughen Indiana's penalties for sex trafficking could be law in Indiana as early as today and just in time for the Super Bowl, which officials fear could become a magnet for prostitution.

The bill gives greater latitude to prosecute those who force girls, some as young as 12, into the paid sex trade. As many as 150,000 people are expected to descend upon Indianapolis for this Sunday's Super Bowl game between the New England Patriots and the New York Giants.

Officials anticipate a substantial increase in prostitution, with out-of-town girls brought in to meet the demand.

"We need to be protecting our children," says Abby Kuzma, head of the Consumer Protection Division for the Indiana Attorney General's office.

Kumza spearheaded the office's push in the Indiana legislature for passage of the bill. She says victims are often abused. Volunteers, including cab drivers, have been trained what to look for in those visiting the city.

"We will be working on the ground and through the Internet. We will have volunteers working very hard to try to identify victims and rescue them," Kuzman told WBEZ in an interview earlier this month. The law strengthens current state regulations in several ways:

- For Individuals who are arrested for human trafficking those under 16 years of age, prosecutors will no longer have to prove force or threat of force against the victim
- The law amends who can be prosecuted. Indiana's current statute limits prosecution to parents or guardians who sell their children. The law is expanded to include any individual who sells children.
- Sexual conduct such as fondling, arousing or other activity that is otherwise not technically prostitution, will be subject to prosecution.
- The bill makes recruiting, transporting or harboring anyone younger than 16 for prostitution a Class A felony punishable by a prison lasting between 20 and 50 years.

The Indiana House voted 93-0 in favor of the bill late last week. It cleared the state senate in a 48-0 vote, just days after the new legislative session began in early January.

Final action in the House was held up by several weeks while Democrats boycotted the House. They were protesting contentious right-to-work legislation proposed by House Republicans.

Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels announced Monday morning that he will sign the bill at 9:30 a.m. Chicago time today. Daniels will be joined by Indiana state Senator Randy Head, the bill's sponsor. The signing will take place in the Governor's office.

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