

October 26, 2015

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

Again, I write to you about the unending reports of child sex traffickers using *Backpage.com* (*Backpage*) as their primary website for advertising and selling children for sex. Backpage should follow the lead of Craigslist and voluntarily shut down the adult services section of its website. Otherwise, Backpage deserves a full federal investigation for enabling child prostitution in Chicago and throughout the United States. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) can no longer ignore the role Backpage plays in facilitating child prostitution.

Last week, yet another Chicago area man was arrested for sex trafficking a 15-year-old girl. This 41-year-old sex trafficker was charged with involuntary sexual servitude and profiting from “dates” he arranged on *Backpage* at which the girl would perform sex acts for money. This is common occurrence on *Backpage*, which is the nation’s most active sex trafficking website and where an estimated 70% of the sex trafficking transactions are arranged.

The time has come for your DOJ to take action against *Backpage* and take seriously President Obama’s statements that sex trafficking is the modern equivalent of slavery. Websites, like *Backpage*, function as nothing other than high-tech slave auctions where the children are advertised and placed on auction. The criminality of these websites permit is patently obvious for all fair-minded people. To think otherwise is a delusion.

The sex traffickers are not arranging innocent dates between consenting adults. In fact, just the contrary is occurring. In Illinois, Cook County Sheriff, Tom Dart, has conducted over 700 stings on Backpage. Without exception, all of Dart's stings (100%) reveal that Backpage's adult advertisements are simply fronts for prostitution. These are facts well known to Backpage’s operators and owners, nevertheless they deny their role in facilitating child sex trafficking.

I ask your DOJ to immediately take all necessary steps to investigate *Backpage*. In addition, DOJ should investigate *Backpage*’s longtime owners Michael Lacey and Jim

Larkin and the circumstances surrounding Lacey's and Larkin's recent sale of *Backpage* to an undisclosed Dutch company.

In pursuing *Backpage*, Lacey, and Larkin, DOJ should bring to bear its full resources, including the FBI's field offices, the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, the DOJ Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs, and local law enforcement departments. DOJ should model the pursuit of *Backpage*, Lacey, and Larkin on DOJ's actions against *MyRedBook.com* (*MyRedBook*), a California based sex trafficking website that DOJ raided, seized, and shut down in June 2014. As you know, DOJ secured its first federal conviction of a website operator for facilitation of prostitution when Eric "Red" Omuro pleaded guilty to using his *MyRedBook* website to facilitate prostitution.

In every material way Omuro's factual admissions about his use of *MyRedbook* apply equally to how Lacey and Larkin have used *Backpage* to facilitate prostitution. Lacy and Larkin designed *Backpage* to facilitate and broker illegal commercial sex transactions through anonymous, on-line advertisements, including advertisements involving child sex trafficking victims. The criminality is clear.

In summary, *Backpage* is nothing more than thinly disguised, child-sex brothel. I urge DOJ to pursue *Backpage*, Lacey, and Larkin in an aggressive manner and end the child sex trafficking scourge.

I look forward to your response on the actions DOJ is taking to investigate and pursue *Backpage*, Lacey, and Larkin.

Sincerely,



Mark Kirk
United States Senator