



## **King County**

### **Metropolitan King County Council**

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November 15, 2012

Commissioner Marilyn Strickland, Chair Pierce Transit  
Mayor of Tacoma  
747 Market Street, #1200  
Tacoma, WA 98402

Honorable Mayor Strickland and Commissioners,

In July, the King County Council voted unanimously in support of a motion sponsored by seven Councilmembers asking the County's transit division and the County Executive to develop and implement a strategy to increase public awareness of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. This campaign will commence in January of 2013.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. Victims of human trafficking include children who are lured into the commercial sex trade, adults age eighteen or over who are coerced or deceived into commercial sex acts, and anyone forced into different forms of "labor or services," such as domestic workers held in a home, or farm workers forced to labor against their will. Human trafficking is a crime under federal law. Human traffickers lure and ensnare individuals into labor trafficking and sex trafficking situations using methods of control such as force, fraud or coercion. In addition to federal anti-human trafficking laws, Washington State has some of the strongest anti-human trafficking laws among the 50 states.

Earlier this year, a Pierce County teenage girl was rescued from two King County gang members who were forcing her to work as a prostitute. The men met her on a Pierce County bus where they were able to lure her into their control. The Pierce County Prosecutor assigned to this case called this young woman the "poster child" for why a public awareness campaign like the one King County will be kicking off soon, could help. The young woman was kicked out of her home; had nowhere to turn for help, and was forced into prostitution. . It is our hope that this public awareness campaign can be a lifesaver for young women just like this.

According to the United States Department of Justice, human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world, with children accounting for half of the victims. Human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children are serious crime problems on a worldwide basis, in Washington State, and in King County. A study by Dr. Debra Boyer conducted for the city of Seattle shows that between three hundred and five hundred children

will be bought and sold in King County this year. The average age of entry into commercial sexual exploitation in the United States is thirteen years old, and children as young as eleven years old have been commercially sexually exploited here in King County.

Washington State has been described as a focal point for the recruitment, transportation and sale of people for labor, due in part to its abundance of ports, proximity to an international border, vast rural areas and dependency on agricultural workers. In 2003, Washington was the first state to criminalize human trafficking. Governor Gregoire signed twelve anti human trafficking bills into law in March 2012, making Washington state a model for comprehensive anti-human trafficking laws.

An indisputable link between public transit and human trafficking has been established. National and local court cases and media stories show that minors are routinely recruited on public transit or at transit stations. Homeless and runaway youth who become victims ride buses not only for transportation, but also because of the perception of safety, and to be out of the weather. Youth who are forced to work as prostitutes wait at bus stops after the coaches have passed in order to make contact with potential customers. In addition, King County's Metro and Sound Transit buses operate in transit corridors where commercially sexually exploited children and other trafficked individuals frequent. Transit systems provide opportunities to broadcast public information campaigns due to the high volume of citizen use and multiple locations.

Because of the strong link between transit and human trafficking, we are asking that Pierce County look at our campaign and partner with King County to run anti-human trafficking ads in January. Our County Executive worked diligently to develop and transmit a plan to the King County Council that outlined his plans for the advertising campaign (see attachment). The motion acknowledges that January 11th is national Anti-human Trafficking Awareness Day, and calls for the public awareness campaign to be in place by January 11, 2013.

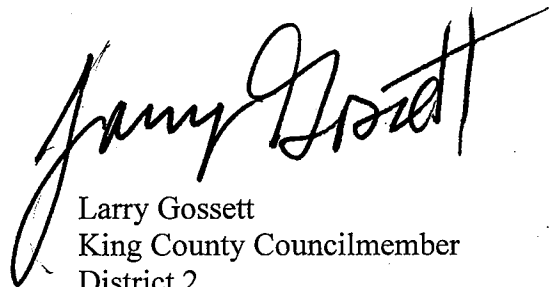
We urge Pierce County to work collaboratively with King County and to support placement of anti-human trafficking materials on its coaches and wherever else possible. Please contact our offices at 206-296-1009 or 206-296-1002 if you have any questions or need further information.

Thank you for your support of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Reagan Dunn  
King County Councilmember  
District 9



Larry Gossett  
King County Councilmember  
District 2