

Testimony of King County Councilman Reagan Dunn

Congressional Hearing Remarks

House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources

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Thank you Mr. Chairman and Congressman McDermott for holding this important hearing today providing some time for me to highlight some of the work King County has done to fight human trafficking.

It is estimated that between 300 and 500 children will be bought and sold in King County this year, and children as young as 11 have been known to have been sexually exploited for commercial purposes in the County.

Through the hard work of many individuals who have worked tirelessly on this issue Washington State has been a leader nationally in legislation to fight human trafficking

I wanted to take a moment here this morning to talk about some of the things we have done at a local level here at King County to fight back against human trafficking.

King County Superior Court, in partnership with the Center for Children and Youth Justice, is leading King County's most comprehensive work yet to support children who have been commercially sexually exploited. Under the leadership of Judge Barbara Mack, the King County Commercially Sexually Exploited Children Task Force is working to develop and implement a coordinated, county wide response to childhood prostitution.

The King County Sheriff's Office plays a key role in King County's human trafficking fight, which you will hear/have heard from the Sheriff today

The King County Prosecutor's Office (PAO) works diligently to prosecute cases of human trafficking. One highlight is the fact that the PAO obtained Washington State's first conviction under the state's Human Trafficking statute, which requires prosecutors to prove that the defendant caused a victim to engage in "forced labor" or "involuntary servitude" for the defendant's personal gain.

Executive departments provide some direct services to victims and have embarked upon educating certain staff about human trafficking.

One significant tool for bringing human trafficking into the open is utilizing the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline that connects callers to resources, including law enforcement, services and information about the crime of human trafficking.

For victims of human trafficking, the public posting of information and hotline phone numbers in locations where the information may be seen is critical, as they might not have access to the Internet or to other forms of community based outreach and awareness programs. For community members, information and calls to the hotline often generate future tips and a better understanding of the red-flag indicators of human trafficking.

As a former federal prosecutor, I prosecuted sex crimes and have been leading a series of legislative efforts at King County to bring better awareness to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline.

In 2012, I drafted legislation to launch a public information campaign utilizing Metro buses to display the human trafficking national hotline number throughout King County. King County's efforts were multiplied through partnerships with private sector media companies Clear Channel Media and Titan as well as with the City of Seattle, which strategically placed billboards along roads in certain locations across Western Washington.

The anti-trafficking campaign was displayed on the outside of more than 200 Metro and Sound Transit buses as well as on smaller signage inside the buses. The buses covered 2,134 square miles of King County with a population of over 2 million people. The public information campaign raised awareness of the signs of human trafficking, leading to an increase in local call volume to the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Estimates are that at least 17 of these calls were crisis calls identifying potential human trafficking situations.

We are still working hard to highlight the national hotline number across King County. I've introduced legislation at the King County Council that calls for the placement of human trafficking public awareness materials in county facilities such as, public health clinics, transit centers, courthouses, and other locations where trafficked individuals and the public may see the information.

The legislation also calls upon the County Executive to explore information posting opportunities with the County's many partners, such as community clinics, shelters, and hospitals, where trafficked individuals may utilize services and in turn see information about who to turn to for help.

The only way we can begin to get a handle on these crimes and stem the tide is to continue to work together and attack the problem from all sides, and I believe that is just what we are doing.

I thank you again Mr. Chairman for being here today, for holding this important hearing, and for all you are doing in Washington DC to find ways to protect children from becoming victims.

I would also like to thank the other stakeholders here this morning for their efforts and for their important testimony. Working hand in hand we can find ways to stop these crimes in their tracks.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.