



Press Release

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Action Network to use RNC and Minnesota State Fair to bring attention to problem of sex trafficking

ST. PAUL, MN – Using the Republican National Convention and the Minnesota State Fair as a backdrop the Action Network to End Sexual Exploitation in Minnesota (ANESEM) announced today the launch of a public awareness campaign to draw attention to the devastating effects of sex trafficking and prostitution.

The Action Network, a grassroots coalition of survivors, community activists, state government and non profit agencies committed to ending sexual exploitation in Minnesota, hopes to confront the unique atmosphere of these large events that often increases the rate of sexual exploitation. Awareness materials will be distributed by volunteers at the Minnesota State Fair, the Republican National Convention, and as part of the Sgt. Jerry Vick Regional Human Trafficking Conference September 23 and 24 at St. Paul's River Centre.

A similar effort was launched by a sister collaboration in Denver during the Democratic National Convention. (Additional information on the Colorado and Minnesota campaigns available at this site: <http://www.mcbw.org/anesem>)

“Sex trafficking and prostitution are significant problems in Minnesota, and are far from victim-less crimes.” said Suzanne Koeplinger, executive director of the Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center and a member of the collaboration. “Our goal is raise the level of knowledge about the realities of this victimization and engage individuals in stopping the demand.”

The campaign’s goal is to humanize victims of sex trafficking and prostitution while at the same time making sure offenders are held accountable. “As a direct service provider I see how devastating this crime is to its victims,” said Beth Jacobs, public policy coordinator for Breaking Free, an agency whose mission is to help women and girls escape prostitution and sex trafficking. “Although it is important to raise awareness we also have a commitment to providing services to victims, holding perpetrators accountable, and changing public opinion to focus less on blaming victims and more on prevention.”

Flyers and posters were developed by a local ad agency Martin Williams, whose pro bono work for the Not For Sale Campaign was adapted for this initial launch. “We hope that this campaign will help to tell the story of what happens to these victims in a way that dissuades people from soliciting victims of sex trafficking, but that also engages citizens to implement concrete steps to stop human trafficking.” said Jim Henderson, executive vice president group creative director. The flyers and posters look like a sales receipt

and picture a young woman along with a short fictional account based on real stories from victims of human trafficking.

The Human Trafficking Conference will feature national leaders on the issue of human trafficking from Federal and State agencies, including members of the Action Network. The conference culminates a month of activities to raise awareness about trafficking and will also coincide with the release of a new state report on human trafficking.

With over 30 endorsements of state departments, political leaders, associations, organization and individuals the Action Network is laying the ground work for an ongoing effort. "This is the beginning of a public and private partnership," Jacobs said. "While we hope to raise awareness, this is also a call to action."

"Victim advocates and law enforcement agencies have been working tirelessly to raise awareness and create collaborative solutions to the problem of sexual exploitation and human trafficking," Koeplinger said. "This campaign is launched to increase the public's awareness of sex trafficking and prostitution, gain their interest in learning what can be done to combat it, and assist those who are rescued from the bondage of modern day slavery."

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