

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Vednita Carter, Executive Director, Breaking Free, 651-645-6557 or
vcarter@breakingfree.net

PRESS CONFERENCE TODAY: LOCAL RESPONSES TO PROSTITUTION

SAINT PAUL, March 13, 2008 – With New York Governor Elliot Spitzer recently linked to the sex trade as a purchaser of services, conversations and debate about the sex industry range from, “It’s a victimless crime,” to “There’s no sliding scale in the exploitation of women... Either you exploit a woman in the commercial sex trade or you don’t.” In Minnesota, law enforcement, criminal justice and social service agencies are employing innovative and aggressive means to stop the demand for prostitution and hold johns accountable, while supporting the true victims, the women, children and men who are prostituted.

In Minnesota there are an estimated 8,000 to 12,000 women and children involved in prostitution on any given night. The average age of entry into prostitution is age 13, with 75 percent of prostituted women having been sexually assaulted before age 18. Nearly all prostituted women are chemically dependent, and one out of three experiences serious and persistent mental health issues. Victims are methodically lured into prostitution from every socioeconomic strata. Homeless and runaway or throwaway youth can expect to be approached by a pimp, john or drug dealer within 36 hours on the street.

“Prostitution is not glamorous. It is highly damaging and for many of its victims the damage can never be repaired,” according to Vednita Carter, executive director of Breaking Free, an agency that provides services to help women escape prostitution.

The Minnesota Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force is vigorously opposed to the legalization of prostitution. Studies of countries that have legalized prostitution have found that regulating prostitution results in a climate that allows criminal gangs, violence and child prostitution to flourish. The Task Force is committed to ending human trafficking and ending the social environment that allows it to take place.

In Ramsey County and the state of Minnesota efforts are underway among civic and social service providers to shed light on the degradation and suffering caused by prostitution and to hold johns accountable. “Stop the Demand” is a partnership of

Breaking Free, the St. Paul City Attorney's Office, Ramsey County Attorney's Office and the St. Paul Police Department, to assure that the purchasers of women in prostitution are held accountable and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

"Prostitution is NOT a victimless crime," says St. Paul City Attorney John Choi. "There are serious consequences for those who are arrested, charged, or convicted of soliciting prostitution in St. Paul. The city has and will continue to dedicate resources to eradicate prostitution because of the detrimental effect it has on our neighborhood and those who engage in this behavior."

Breaking Free, St. Paul Police Chief John Harrington, the St. Paul City Attorney John Choi, and the Minnesota Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force are hosting a **press conference at 3:30pm on Thursday, March 13, at St. Paul City Hall, room 40A on the lower level.**