**File #:** Res 1226-2012, **Version:** A

Res. No. 1226-A

Resolution calling on Village Voice Media to stop accepting adult services advertisements on its online classified site, Backpage.com, because it serves as a platform to traffic minors and adult victims for sex.

By Council Members Lander, Mark-Viverito, Brewer, Chin, Crowley, James, Lappin, Levin, Recchia, Rose, Palma, Ferreras, Rodriguez, Barron, Gennaro, Jackson, Mealy, Sanders Jr., and Ulrich

Whereas, According to the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, human trafficking is defined as the "recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person to perform labor or a commercial sex act through force, fraud, or coercion;" and

Whereas, In addition, according to the United States Department of Justice ("DOJ"), the TVPA further states that "any commercial sex act performed by a person under age 18 is considered human trafficking, regardless of whether force, fraud, or coercion is involved;" and

Whereas, A DOJ Office of Justice Programs (OJP) December 2011 Fact Sheet on Human Trafficking states that as many as 300,000 children are at risk for sexual exploitation each year in the United States; and

Whereas, One vehicle used to exploit and "market" such victims is online advertising for "adult services;" and

Whereas, After news reports linking Craigslist adult advertising to crimes that included sex trafficking and murder, and after much public pressure and a letter signed by 17 states' attorneys general, Craigslist banned sexually related advertising in September 2010; and

Whereas, According to a *New York Times* article entitled "Fighting Over Online Sex Ads," once Craigslist discontinued such advertising, a large amount of the approximately $44 million in sex-related advertising went to Backpage.com; and

Whereas, Backpage.com and its parent company, Village Voice Media, have been contacted by numerous advocacy groups, law enforcement officials and religious organizations asking them to cease hosting ads that facilitate commercial sexual exploitation through its website Backpage.com; and

Whereas, A letter to Backpage.com from the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) dated August 31, 2011, states that charges were filed against persons who trafficked or attempted to traffic minors using Backpage.com in over 50 instances in 22 states over the course of three years; and

Whereas, In a *New York Times* article published on January 25, 2012, the lead sex trafficking prosecutor from the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office said a vast majority of the 32 cases her office prosecuted in the last year included victims "marketed" through Backpage.com; and

Whereas, Furthermore, in the same article she stated "Pimps are turning to the internet" and "Backpage is a great vehicle for pimps trying to sell girls;" and

Whereas, Currently Backpage.com refuses to cease hosting ads that facilitate sex trafficking and claims the company monitors the adult services section "24/7;" and

Whereas, On March 23, 2012, nineteen United States Senators sent a letter to the Village Voice Media's Chief Executive Officer echoing the sentiments of the Attorneys General and others by calling on the Village Voice to remove the adult services section from Backpage.com; and

Whereas, Sex trafficking is a heinous crime that must be addressed in the most serious manner possible; and

Whereas, To bolster actions by law enforcement, society should assist in eradicating such crimes by adjusting practices to make it more difficult for these criminals to function; and

Whereas, Backpage.com is facilitating sex trafficking and should alter its current practice; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on Village Voice Media to stop accepting adult services advertisements on its online classified site, Backpage.com, because it serves as a platform to

traffic minors and adult victims for sex.

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