

## Chicago aims to change view on prostitution

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CHICAGO (FOX 32 News) - Governor Pat Quinn is expected to sign a new law on sex trafficking next month, which is another victory for advocates who've been battling to change the way people look at prostitution.

"People seem to think that the women are the problem, the problem is the customers, the demand, the people who want to purchase," said sex trafficking survivor Brenda Myers-Powell.

Lynne Johnson of the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation weighed in on the issue as well.

"Even if we just arrested johns at the rate we do prostituted women, in Chicago we could raise upwards of 3 million dollars in a year," said Johnson.

That money would come from fines against johns who get busted, as well as the pimps who get convicted. The new law in Illinois would treat them as the criminals and use their money to help the victims of sex trafficking.

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"There's not one place in the city of Chicago that actually works with women in prostitution, there's not a home, there's not a place for women, so we need to change that," Myers-Powell added.

Myers-Powell is on a mission to show people the real face of sex trafficking, where the average age of entry is 16.

"I wanted somebody to tell me I was pretty, I wanted somebody to love me, I wanted somebody to be nice to me, cause I was abused at home," Myers-Powell said.

Myers-Powell now works for the Cook County sheriff and whenever someone gets picked up for soliciting, she's there to offer a rescue.

When talking to an arrested prostitute, Myers-Powell said, "I been in your shoes, ok? I want you to know, that I know how you feel."

Sometimes, though, talking to the women doesn't always help.

"Understand, I get maybe an hour or two with this girl, the traffickers had what? Five years, two years, three years in their life -- to brainwash her, to cultivate her, to make her think like he wants her to think," Myers-Powell added.

"People involved in prostitution have rates of post-traumatic stress disorder similar to that of combat war veterans," Johnson said.

There's one shelter that focuses on that trauma -- Anne's House run by the Salvation Army, which offers specialized counseling and extra security.

However, there are just 12 beds in the entire state.

"There can be anywhere between 16 and 24 thousand women and girls impacted by prostitution on any given day in the Chicago metropolitan area," Johnson added.

The new focus on targeting johns & traffickers, and providing funds to rehabilitate victims, makes it seem like a new day for an old crime.

But can you really end demand?

"Uh, probably not," an arrested john told FOX 32's Robin Robinson.

"People gonna desire what they desire, whether it's drugs, sex, and they're gonna find a way to get it," said neighbor Phillip Hammons.

People who live on the block tell FOX 32 News that the hotel they share it with is not such a bad neighbor.

"I used to work in this hotel, I used to take my johns into this hotel, this hotel rents hourly, two hours, you know. (So everybody knows it) everybody knows it," Myers-Powell said.

The owner of the hotel spoke briefly with FOX 32.

"Here's what I can tell ya, I never had a narcotic bust in there, ain't nobody ever got hurt in there," said the owner.

However, he seemed confused when FOX 32 asked about his hotel's reputation.

"You're trying to put me out of business," exclaimed the owner.

FOX 32's Robin Robinson responded, "If that's your business, that would be illegal."

Recognizing that sex trafficking is a crime against the person being trafficked has been a slow evolution. But since FOX 32's Robin Robinson's first series on the

topic 15 years ago, she's come to a whole new viewpoint. It's the facts, the research, the brave survivors -- like Brenda -- coming forward that did it.

For more information, [visit the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation's website.](#)

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