Addressing Human Trafficking in Seattle WA and Portland OR

**Overview of the problem**
The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is defined as sexual abuse of a minor for economic gain. It involves physical abuse, pornography, prostitution and the smuggling of children for unlawful purposes\(^1\). For purposes of this workshop and initiative we have focused our efforts on eliminating the sexual trading of children. While data on the exact statistics of CSEC incidents are scarce, we have seen evidence of a continuing trend towards the commercial exploitation of children. Victims who are introduced into the trade are often made a promise of a better life. Once they become part of the sex trade, they are often assaulted and coerced to ensure obedience and prevent escape.

The United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Population Fund estimate that 2 million children are exploited in prostitution or pornography every year. While exact figures for the United States are unknown at this time, a 2002 study by the University of Pennsylvania estimated that approximately 300,000 children are at risk of exploitation\(^2\). In 2012, vice detectives from Seattle and Portland estimated that there are approximately 300 to 500 child prostitutes trafficked along the I-5 corridor on a monthly basis.

**Why solving the CSEC problem is so hard**
CSEC is especially hard to detect and solve as the crimes are controlled by tech savvy human traffickers that have moved child prostitution from the visibility of the street corner to the shadows of the Internet. Armed with social media and mobile communications technology, traffickers now utilize an elaborate network to expand the reach of their criminal activity while avoiding discovery and capture from the approximately 17,000 separate law enforcement agencies in the US. The traffickers are able to communicate effectively with one another electronically and assist one another in the recruitment, selection and indoctrination of victims. They will often assist in the coercion and disciplining of those victims who escape their captor by creating a “trapped” feeling for victims where they cannot mentally escape the cycle of abuse. As well, law enforcement officials have reported that today’s human trafficking networks make extensive use of information technology to gather intelligence, report trends and quickly evolve their tactics to avoid detection and subsequent prosecution.

**Why now is the right time to tackle this problem**
President Obama recently declared January 2013 to be National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month bringing great attention this issue. Further, the evolution of cloud technologies and maturity of national information sharing standards have lowered the barriers for collaboration between law enforcement agencies. As a result, current technologies could allow law enforcement professionals

---


to share tips / lessons learned and to detect patterns that identify potential cases of sexual exploitation of children. Similar to the tracking of terrorists and serial killers, technology can also help to solve the problem of spotting CSEC patterns by patrolling public websites where human traffickers advertise their activities. In doing so, a technology solution can identify potential victims found on these public websites and notify officers and detectives for further investigation.

**Our approach to addressing the problem**

We believe the solution needs to begin with front line officers that patrol our streets. These professionals have the opportunity to observe the actions of potential victims and perpetrators on a daily basis. They are often best positioned to intercede on the victims’ behalf when the evidence allows. The front line officer needs the ability to easily access information indicating they have come in contact with a child who has been sexually exploited, reported missing, or has been previously arrested for prostitution. As a result, the solution should allow the front line officer to collect and submit minimal data about a potential victim and subsequently receive immediate feedback as to whether the juvenile may be a CSEC victim.

Secondly, CSEC investigators require the ability to easily collaborate with their peers in other departments and other cities. Since children are trafficked and traded across multiple city, county, and state lines, the solution must similarly enable law enforcement to share information on CSEC cases across multiple jurisdictions. Armed with regional information, investigators can develop a deeper understanding of geographical trends and patterns of behavior to further CSEC investigations.

**Proposed next steps**

The work to provide more effective tools to combat CSEC has already begun. Seattle PD, Portland PD, and Microsoft have participated in problem solving workshops to identify and document the capabilities of a regional human trafficking information sharing system, including use cases, high level technical design, and estimated cost. Efforts are now underway to engage community stakeholders and other government agencies for their feedback and support. Additionally, under the leadership of the City of Seattle, funding sources are being identified to move forward with the first phase of the regional human trafficking information sharing system, to include deployment of a prototype followed by a full rollout to Seattle and Portland police departments. Once deployed, Seattle PD, Portland PD and Microsoft envision the solution will be made available to other law enforcement across the region to help eradicate CSEC from their communities.