

# On portland sex trafficking

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Most people, when they think of Portland, think of the local restaurants, public transportation, and the people's affinity for bicycling, but it often goes over people's heads that Portland is a hub of sex trafficking in America.

While human sex trafficking is not new, it has become more prevalent of an issue as we have put more focus on it recently, and become aware of how bad it really is. Between 2009 and 2014 Portland had 421 suspected sex traffickers, each of which is likely trafficking more than one victim (Campbell). And those are just the ones who have been suspected.

Luckily people like the police, and organizations like the Polaris Project are working on cracking down on human trafficking and getting the knowledge out there about the severity of the problem. The reason sex trafficking is such a problem in Portland is that it is able to easily piggyback off of legal sex shops and strip clubs and Portland has more adult establishments per capita than any other city in America. This is because in Portland, unlike in anywhere else in America, there are no zoning restrictions on adult establishments, meaning they can pop up anywhere, including right next to schools, like the one just two blocks down from Madison High School.

Because of this lack of restriction, Portland's number of sex shops compared to other sex trafficking hot spots is shocking, as stated by Michal Elseth in "Portland's Dark World of Child Sex Trafficking," "While Seattle has four strip clubs, and Dallas, another trafficking hot spot, has three, Portland has more than 50 all-nude strip clubs within city limits." Not only that, but strip clubs don't follow as many restrictions and safeguards than in most other states, as the dancers are considered "contractors" and not required to have permits(Elseth).

There has been a lot of focus on sex trafficking in the last 20 years. Starting with the free speech clause in the Oregon constitution, Established in 1857, article 1, section 8 forbids laws from “restraining the free expression of opinion, or restricting the right to speak, write, or print on any subject whatsoever” allowed for the booming legal sex industry in portland to flourish and pose easy fronts for the illegal sex industry. The cornerstone of anti human trafficking laws came in the year 2000 in the form of The Trafficking Victims Protection Act. This act classified human trafficking as a federal crime, and establishes a few organizations dedicated to monitoring and preventing human trafficking. Then in 2003, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act was created which, among other things, gave trafficking victims the right to sue their traffickers. But almost all of the recent laws passed have been greatly helpful in the effort to stop human trafficking in America.

(“ Current Federal Laws” Polaris) Thanks to these laws many programs and organizations have been formed in support of the people affected by sex trafficking. Organizations like Polaris, and departments like the Child Safety Education Coalition, CSEC unit of the Department of Human Services, formed in 2011, who work to identify and help the many victims of human trafficking. And it is absolutely true that those victims need help. Victims of sex trafficking do not receive protection during trials. Meaning if anyone related to their trafficker found out they were testifying against them, they would be put in immense danger, which they have no protection from. Because of this most traffickers never get convicted because of the dangers of testifying the victims have to go through to get them put away.

While Portland has become a hub for sex trafficking with 429 sex traffickers between 2009 and 2014, thanks to the big spotlight recently put on human trafficking, the laws that have been passed in the last 20 years, and the organizations and legal departments created to support the prevention of human trafficking, it looks like we are going in the right way to end this plague that affects our state, country, and the entire world. If you want to help in ending sex trafficking in Portland, just stay aware. Help spread the knowledge about how and why this is happening, and help those who have been affected. And hopefully in the not so distant future, the image people have of Portland won't be shadowed by such a dark problem as human trafficking.