

# The WATCH Chronicle

WATCH is a court monitoring and judicial policy non-profit located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. WATCH works to make the justice system more responsive to crimes of violence against women and children, focusing on greater safety for victims of violence and greater accountability for violent offenders.

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## WATCH FEATURE



Rep. Dave Pinto, DFL-St. Paul

### Rep. Dave Pinto: “We need to have everybody paying attention.”

#### Second in a two-part series

This month, we continue our conversation with state Rep. Dave Pinto, DFL-St. Paul, who authored legislation this year to strengthen sex-trafficking investigations across Minnesota. Pinto, an assistant county attorney for Ramsey County, also directs training and protocol development for the state’s Safe Harbor law, which among other things treats adolescents caught in the sex industry as victims rather than criminals.

**Q:** Sex-trafficking seems like such a multi-pronged problem. Isn’t it one thing to be aware of it, but another thing to be able to prosecute it?

**A:** It’s extremely multi-pronged. When you become aware of it, you talk about helping the girl. Are there immediate services? Somebody to receive a call? Longer-term services in place? That’s where the Safe Harbor system comes in. ... And absolutely, there’s investigating the case. Remember that, unlike other cases, you might have a victim who’s not cooperative. It’s like a domestic violence case in that way. But it’s so much more complicated than that.

Also, there’s [the matter of] going after the people who are buying the sex. That’s a whole different angle. It’s really complicated. But there’s a whole group of folks working on it, and that’s pretty cool.

**Q:** Can you discuss the challenge of being able to wrap your arms around the entirety of sex trafficking?

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Minnesota Rep. Dave Pinto

“I just kind of naturally look at the big picture, and I think that’s really necessary here. These situations are happening all around us.”

**A:** I just kind of naturally look at the big picture, and I think that’s really necessary here. These situations are happening everywhere. The victims are all around us. But they’re extremely hard cases to identify. We need everybody to be paying attention: professionals and non-professionals; bus drivers, cab drivers, coffee shop people, parents and teachers. At a training for hotels, we had a big poster with a hanging door tag that said “Please DO Disturb.”

**Q:** So let’s talk about the the bill you authored. Is that focused on getting the expertise in place?

**A:** In my county work, my job is to train law enforcement and prosecutors. We want the cops to have their eyes open. That’s happening now. ... Here’s the thing, though. Once they see it and identify it, what happens then? What happens when you are the investigator and you and your patrol have been well-trained? And all of a sudden they say “I got a call from a mom who said my daughter has three cell phones and makeup and a new purse. How’s she paying for that?” These start flooding your desk. What are you going to do? The grants are aimed at paying for more investigation time.

**Q:** So it sounds like this is only the beginning.

**A:** Yes. It’s a finger in the dyke. It’s a band-aid. It’s a stopgap measure, just the crisis response. In the longer term—and we are moving more solidly on the legislative side of this—we spend a lot of money investigating drug trafficking in this state. And I believe there is as much need for investigative resources on the sex trafficking side as on the drug trafficking side... maybe even more, because we’re talking about human beings. ... In terms of policy and my legislative role, that’s something I’d like to explore.

I am working with law enforcement leaders and others to explore that, and I do hope to have a proposal related to that soon ... at an upcoming legislative session. In the short run, though, we just need some dollars to fund investigations.

**Q:** Is this because these kinds of prosecutions take so much time?

**A:** Take an example of two 15-year-olds in a car with a 52-year-old guy at 3 in the morning, and the officer can’t do anything but has a bad feeling. So what’s your choice? It takes a while. My bill is really filling this spot: There’s training, sure, there’s protocol being developed ...but there’s this gap in the middle, where the well-trained sergeant is there and has the expertise and cares about it, but already has 20 cases. You need more hours! And my original thought was to respond to that.     ◆◆◆◆



## IN THE NEWS

### Minneapolis police suspend prostitution stings following “outrageous” conduct

Minneapolis police will no longer use officers in massage parlor prostitution stings after three cases were dismissed last month. [Hennepin County judges tossed two recent cases, and the city of Minneapolis threw out another](#). The officers in those cases engaged in sexual conduct with the suspects as part of their arrest procedure.

One judge [called the conduct “outrageous.”](#)

Minneapolis Police Chief Janee Harteau said a city massage parlor licensing ordinance will now be the primary way to deter prostitution in those businesses without the need to build criminal cases.

[In a news commentary](#), St. Paul defense attorney Heather Kennedy-Bordeaux says there is “absolutely, unequivocally” no reason for an officer to engage in sex acts and that such activity makes those officers “victimizers of the highest order.”

“They swore an oath to protect the community, which includes these women,” Kennedy-Bordeaux writes in the *Star Tribune*.

According to *Star Tribune* columnist Jon Tevlin, [the Minneapolis Police Department has no policy](#) regarding prostitution stings.

“That is astounding, but it still doesn’t explain the officers’ egregious behavior,” Tevlin writes. Police officers have known since 2009 that engaging in sex acts with a defendant can ruin their cases.

“So not only was the officers’ behavior morally repugnant,” he concludes, “it was also dumb police work.”

- Read the *Star Tribune* news article [here](#).
- Read Heather Kennedy-Bordeaux’s op-ed column [here](#).
- Read Jon Tevlin’s column [here](#).

- What are the details of the new massage parlor licensing ordinance? How have the new rules for such businesses affected illegal activity?

- What does the head of the Minneapolis police union say about how undercover officers should conduct themselves during prostitution investigations?

Read the [Star Tribune article](#) to find out.

- Why does defense attorney Heather Kennedy-Bordeaux call the officers involved in the dismissed prostitution cases “victimizers of the highest order?”

Read her opinion piece [here](#).

## Backpage: Does the site help sex traffickers or those trying to stop them?

Backpage.com, the huge classified web site, is often accused of abetting the sexual trafficking and exploitation of women and minors. But not everyone feels that way.

[In an Aug. 16 takeout](#), Associated Press writer Martha Irvine explores the heated and complex debate surrounding the web site. She interviews Backpage's general counsel, who argues that the site is protected by the first amendment and that, in fact, it's helping law enforcement save victims and ensnare perpetrators.

While many in law enforcement point a finger of blame at the site, others—including a Minneapolis investigator on the front lines against underage trafficking—contend that Backpage should be viewed as an ally in the fight against sexual exploitation.

Minneapolis Sgt. Grant Snyder, the lead detective on the department's human trafficking team, says he regularly gets information from the site that helps convict traffickers and rescue victims. And while many claim that Backpage promotes such exploitation, the site has donated to causes helping girls leave prostitution and runs public service ads for a rescue hotline.

However, others such as Thomas Dart, sheriff of Cook County in Illinois, concludes that any help from Backpage isn't worth what he views as the endless tide of sex trafficking advertised on the site.

Since 2009, Cook County sheriff's officers have made more than 800 arrests by using information from Backpage ads or posting fake ads to lure johns.

- Read the Associated Press news article [here](#).

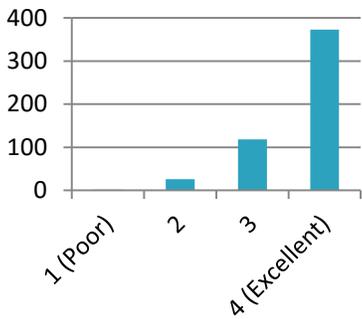


- Why does Sgt. Grant Snyder of Minneapolis argue that law enforcement would do better to work with Backpage than against it?
- How do others, such as Sheriff Thomas Dart of Cook County, argue that the site makes it easier for sex traffickers to operate?
- How does Backpage say it aids law enforcement and combats child prostitution?

Read [The Associated Press news article](#) to find out.

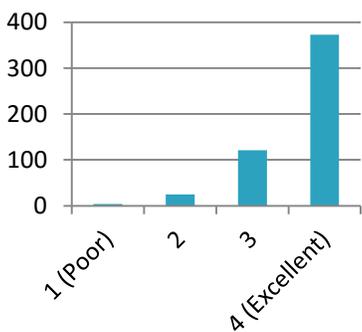
# COURT MONITORING BULLETIN

## Were people treated with courtesy and respect?



Poor:	1	2	0.4%
	2	26	5.0%
	3	118	22.7%
Excellent:	4	373	71.9%

## Was the courtroom orderly?



Poor:	1	4	0.8%
	2	25	4.8%
	3	121	23.1%
Excellent:	4	373	71.3%

## Monitor Update: Courtroom Decorum

WATCH recognizes the powerful impact judges, lawyers and employees of the court have on victims and defendants in domestic violence cases. As such, WATCH asks courtroom monitors to rate various aspects of courtroom decorum: whether people in the courtroom were treated with dignity and respect; whether the courtroom was orderly; and whether the monitor felt safe in the courtroom as well as in areas adjacent to the courtroom.

Between January and August 2015, monitors overwhelmingly gave high marks in the categories above. In 373 of 519 total cases, or 72 percent of the time, monitors gave the top mark of 4 when rating whether people in the courtroom were treated with dignity and respect. Some 118 cases, or 23 percent, drew ratings of 3 in that category.

As to whether courtrooms were orderly, 373 cases, or 71 percent, received top marks. When monitors rated whether they felt safe and secure in the courtroom, they gave the highest scores eighty-five percent of the time.

Among other things, monitors noted:

*“The judge did a fantastic job keeping the court in order. The judge had to intervene a number of times to counsel to keep it civil. The prosecuting attorney was very frustrated with the victim. ...”*

*“The attorneys were impatient with everyone in court, including defendants and the public.”*

*“Courtroom was orderly and all actors remained level-headed and calm.”*

*“The judge looked very sympathetic and caring.”*

*“The cops were quite chatty and seen laughing together at jokes during first appearances.”*

*“Facial expressions from the judge. The gallery was very rude.”*

*“The judge was irritated with Mr. [X] and rolling her eyes.”*

*“I could barely hear the sentencing because numerous attorneys and defendants and probation officers were talking during the proceedings.”*

*“Several apparent friends of defendant were in the courtroom. All discussed [their belief] that this defendant wasn’t guilty.”*



## SEX TRAFFICKING UPDATE

### Ringleader Sentenced to 20 Years



Thomas William Evans

The prosecuting attorney described at length how Mr. Evans had spearheaded the systematic process of selling girls, both juvenile and adults, for sex in exchange for money, which allowed him to live the lavish lifestyle to which he had grown accustomed.

On Aug. 20, a [Ramsey County District judge sentenced Thomas William Evans to 20 years in prison](#) for his role leading a multi-state sex trafficking ring that included minors. Since then, [three others have also been sentenced](#) for their involvement in the ring, and a final defendant is set to be sentenced at the end of the month. Evans, 26, of St. Paul, pleaded guilty in June to six of the seven felony charges against him. Ellen Sackrison, WATCH's volunteer coordinator, attended Evans's sentencing hearing and shared her thoughts below:

**E**ven knowing the charges and time in prison the defendant faced, I was not prepared for what I was about to witness.

Before the hearing began, the defense counsel walked in and asked: "Do I even want to see the PSI [pre-sentencing investigation]?" With a chuckle, the prosecuting attorney responded: "No."

About 20 minutes later, Mr. Evans was escorted into the courtroom. Offering 240 months due to his "taking responsibility and sparing the victims a trial," the prosecuting attorney described at length how the defendant had spearheaded the systematic process of selling girls, both juvenile and adults, for sex in exchange for money, which allowed him to live the lavish lifestyle to which he had grown accustomed. The prosecutor also discussed how the defendant had treated women and children as commodities and objects and used intimidation to recruit victims.

The defendant and his attorney were given the chance to speak. While conceding that his client was being convicted of a "horrible crime," the defense counsel said he wanted Mr. Evans to explain comments he made to a probation officer during his PSI interview. The attorney also mentioned a documentary aired on A&E that told the story of Mr. Evans and his case. His client was upset that he'd been put in the spotlight, the attorney said, explaining that he is navigating "a world of living in prison and a world where he can protect his family." The defense counsel added that this was no excuse for his client's behavior.

Mr. Evans was then given the opportunity to explain his earlier comment, "going to pimp a bitch when [I] come out of prison," in his interview with

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the probation officer. Mr. Evans clarified in court that he was referring to someone raping a girl and getting 18 years, yet rapes again after getting out of prison. The conversation was difficult to hear, yet Judge Jennifer Frisch said she understood and asked Mr. Evans if he had anything else to say on the record. Mr. Evans then said he did not appreciate A&E featuring his picture in its documentary, or that the Ramsey County Attorney’s office had released his picture to the media. “They are making it all about me,” Mr. Evans said, adding that because the documentary was shown in prison, correctional officers and other inmates were now treating him differently.

When the judge then reminded the defendant why he was going to prison for 20 years, Mr. Evans seemed to show little interest.

“I am very troubled that after everything you’ve been through in this case, that you don’t seem to understand the gravity of your role in the case,” the judge told the defendant. “You showed an astonishing level of inhumanity.”

I commend Judge Frisch for standing up for the victims who were not present during the hearing. She described how Mr. Evans had trafficked hundreds of girls, how he enslaved them and sold them as his property. “You forced them to have sex, you beat them, tortured them. You took their dignity and their humanity,” she said. The judge then chastized Mr. Evans for showing no remorse and taking no responsibility for what he had done. “These girls for the rest of their lives will have to live with this,” the judge said, to which Mr. Evans interjected: “They still some pussies, though.” The judge responded that the victims were family, friends, daughters, neighbors—“just like your daughter. You wouldn’t want anyone to do this to your daughter; so don’t do it other people’s daughters.” In closing, the judge called the sentence a step toward the victims’ recovery, and said she hoped it would give Mr. Evans time to think about what he had done.

Mr. Evans was found guilty of two felony counts of Engages in Sex Trafficking of Individual-Under 18 years old and three counts of Engages in Sex Trafficking of an Individual. He seemed unfazed by his prison sentence. As he left, he shared with the entire courtroom that he “will be back in 20 years.”

