

Advisory Committee on the Status of Women

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**Joint Commission Meeting of the
Advisory Committee on the Status of Women & Human Rights Commission**

**Tuesday January 13th, 2015, 5:30pm
Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber (3rd floor)**

Meeting Summary

1. Call to Order: A quorum was established and the meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm by Human Rights Commissions Chair Mr. Edward G. Robinson. The Chair then invited Mr. Edward M. Augustus, Jr, City Manager, City of Worcester to open the meeting with a few words to address attendees. He stated that this is an important issue and was glad to bring the joint commissions as well as representatives from the police department together to gain a deeper understanding of what is currently being done, and what can be done to proceed effectively in the future.

2. The Worcester Police Department's overview regarding prostitution

The three officer panel from the Worcester Police Department, WPD, included Police Chief Gary Gemme, Deputy Chief Mark Roche and Captain Paul Saucier. The police contingent acknowledged that prostitution and sex trafficking was a problem in Worcester which presented certain challenges in order to combat them. They noted the recent sting had resulted in more arrests of Johns than usual. Captain Saucier has attended the Worcester Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, WAASE, meetings for a number of years and appeared well versed in the complex issues involved. He provided information on the status, trends, and continuing challenges faced in approaching this from the demand/John side of the issue. While pointing to their recent sting success arresting more Johns than prostitutes, they cited safety concerns for their female undercover officers during such operations. They noted that a price for service needs to be established for an arrest, but that often Johns request the women to get in the car first which can lead to physical contact and further endanger the female officer. The police noted that prostitution is a big threat and challenge to the city's safety and quality of life. The police department does want to work in the direction of approaching illicit sex trade from the demand side, yet is still facing issues with guaranteeing safety in those situations.



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After their brief presentation, the floor was opened for public questions and comments. One question asked for the differentiation between nightwalkers and common streetwalkers. The panel responded that there was no major difference, and both could lead to arrests. The limited number of female officers who could be used in such an operation, as well as limited officers further hampered a more robust response to stings for Johns. It was noted that these areas generally have a higher crime rate exacerbating the situation of keeping everyone on the streets safe during an operation.

Over the last two years out of 78 arrests, 11 were men and 67 were female. The punishment for men is far less stringent than for women who have to attend more classes, pay fines and have it listed on their records. The women, however, are often released from jail by the next day, with few or no services in place for them, such as detox, rehabilitation, or other supportive services which tends to result in resuming the old practices and substance abuse. The recidivism rate is very high. In most cases, the Johns police records result in a finding of "Continued without a Cause," which is a far less serious finding than could otherwise be found on a police record.

A serious concern was raised by more recent trends of cell phone use, and advertisements taken out by the young women themselves posting them in online publications advertising their services. These sometimes include local hotels often identifiable in the background of their photo. These methods make it harder to track down as they are transient and mobile, behind closed doors. Studies have allegedly found that consumers of the website advertisements are repeat customers.

The Johns often come from out of town, so as not to be recognized in their own city or town, and have followed young college students for blocks soliciting them for prostitution. Also sex traders translocate their business from other towns to Worcester and vice versa, keeping victims dependent and isolated. Massage parlors and strip clubs were noted as a start to the business with the apparent rock bottom being street prostitution.

On a more positive light, two outreach workers have been hired to work directly with this female population in order to connect them to services directly from the court process. While this is a good effort, as are the sting operations targeting more Johns, the panel and commissions acknowledged, that more work and assistance needs to be done in the court system on this issue. It was agreed that the problem was not one that could be arrested away, but one that called upon a full community involvement and a public health approach.

The Worcester Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, WAASE, presented a list of eight recommendations to the WPD which were largely favorably looked upon by those officers present. One of the eight included a request to list outreach workers phone numbers in the booking room at the WPD to permit women arrested for prostitution ease in accessing case management assistance early on in the process.

The Police are working to coordinate more closely with social services organizations, local concerned communities and the WAASE and End Demand group to stop human trafficking and end the cycle of prostitution. The panel from the WPD received and offered some suggestions to commission members. The panel first assured the commissions of their intent to work hand in hand on the prostitution issue. They cited that having better information from available advocates, public health staff, and other health and social work professionals (those working outside law enforcement) would complement their information and be good assets. Police also mentioned the anonymous tip hotline to provide timely information.

3. Public Comment

Several people delivered public comment about prostitution in Worcester. Many voiced safety concerns for women. One participant recalled the time several years ago when many Worcester women were missing, then found dead in grisly unsolved murders possibly related to the sex trade. The importance of training programs for men, women and the Ray of Light program are meant to educate community on this important subject which touches the whole community. The continuity of the stings, effective data delivery, availability of support and substance abuse

programs as well as buyer's violence were among public topics discussed. It was agreed that this is a topic that required combined efforts by the community.

4. Adjournment