

Preventing Child Sex Trafficking at Motels/Hotels Receiving County Vouchers

Throughout Los Angeles County (County), children as young as nine are being exploited sexually for commercial purposes. According to the California Child Welfare Council, a trafficker may earn as much as \$650,000 in a year by selling as few as four children. Often, motels and hotels are used by traffickers and buyers of sex with children as the venue for exploitation. According to The Polaris Project, an international anti-human trafficking organization named after the North Star which guided slaves to freedom in the United States, victims may be forced to stay at a hotel or motel where customers come to them or they are required to go to rooms rented out by the customers or traffickers. Additionally, sex trafficking victims often stay in hotels and motels with their traffickers while moving to different cities or states. Approximately 45 motels/hotels are used Countywide to house homeless individuals through the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) General Relief (GR) Emergency Housing program, which was developed to provide temporary shelter for homeless GR

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applicants while their application financial assistance is pending. An estimated 22 of these motels are located in the 2nd District, by far the highest percentage in the County. Of those 22 in the 2nd District, at least half are located on well-known prostitution tracks.

The Emergency Housing Program provides temporary shelter up to 14 days paid at an amount that should not exceed \$24.00 per day. This amount has been in effect since 2003, when the last increase to the daily rate for shelter was made. Homeless applicants specify the length of time needed in emergency shelter and DPSS issues housing vouchers that are redeemable at hotels/motels and emergency shelters (known as vendors) participating in the DPSS Emergency Housing Program. Each year the number of individuals who use the Emergency Housing Program increases. In 2013, DPSS paid approximately \$3.5 million to motels/hotels participating in the program and made roughly 21,000 referrals.

Motels participating in the program are not contracted with the County; rather they sign an agreement that allows them to be added to the participating vendor list. The agreement is at-will and can be terminated at any time by either party. DPSS currently has two staff members that periodically visit the vendors during normal business hours to ensure compliance with County safety regulations. However, there is not a clear line of communication between law enforcement and DPSS to alert the agency when there is an incident, particularly after 5 p.m. and before 9 a.m. Robbery, vandalism, battery and other crimes have been reported to take place at motels located on known prostitution tracks. This has created a dangerous environment for inhabitants

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of the motels as well for residents nearby who have complained of the negative effects these motels have on the neighborhood.

Furthermore, since the vendors sign only agreements and do not sign contracts, there is not a competitive process to ensure that the best services are provided and to hold the vendor accountable to given standards. DPSS and County Counsel are currently in the process of determining the possibility of forming an open competitive bid for the Emergency Housing Program. The County must ensure that when it is working in partnership with entities to house homeless individuals, it is not perpetuating unsafe conditions for families and children, and blight in neighborhoods.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Instruct the Director of the Department of Public Social Services and County Counsel to report back in 30 days on the following:

1. Provide a feasibility analysis for a competitive bid process for emergency shelter services contracts. The open competitive bid should require the following as a standard for contracting:
 - a. Require any motel that is receiving a voucher from Los Angeles County (County) to sign a contract stating that they will not participate in or allow any form of sex trafficking to take place in their facilities or on their premises;
 - b. Require every hotel/motel that is receiving voucher(s) to hang a poster in a visible place with hotline information to report a possible

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sex/human trafficking incident and for victims to receive help;

- c. Have hotels/motels that receive vouchers agree to allow law enforcement to check guest registries at-will.
 - d. Require every hotel/motel that is receiving a voucher to take a training session on sex trafficking provided by the County.
2. Identify options to increase funding for the General Relief Emergency Housing Program that would augment the daily stipend for shelter.
 3. Include other housing options available to this population in the report.

(LM/GCT)

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