



MICHAEL W. MORRISSEY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Press Release

Police, schools, social services part of DA Morrissey's campaign Combatting Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

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More than 80 members of regional law enforcement, school departments, state and private social service providers, and state Rep. Walter Timilty joined Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey April 3 as the Norfolk Advocates for Children, the DA and dozens of local police and service agencies launched a joint effort to combat the recruiting and selling of young girls for sex in this region.

“The internet has taken what was, years ago, thought of as an urban problem and made it an everywhere problem,” District Attorney Morrissey said. “We need a coordinated, thoughtful effort to combat it and help these children. As we heard today, the most common age that girls are being drawn into the commercial sex trade and sold is now middle school.”

The task force launching from this training will be developing information and guidelines for how providers and law enforcement can identify girls who are being targeted, and how to respond to best protect and help the victims while holding the abusers accountable, Morrissey said.

The District Attorney said he was very encouraged to have so many police departments, school departments and those working directly with teens attending the all-day “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Identification and Response” training he and the Norfolk Advocates for Children hosted at the Bank of Canton auditorium April 3. “This was an important move forward in helping these kids.”

“We are seeing your girls. We are seeing girls from a number of Norfolk County communities,” Lisa Goldblatt Grace said at the opening of the conference. Grace is the founding co-director of the “My Life My Choice” program in Boston, which provides outreach and intervention to target populations – like group homes, programs and schools – to help those children avoid the traps that pimps use to bring young girls into situations where they can be exploited.

The program also helps girls escape, and stay free, if they are already trapped “in the life,” according to program associate director Audrey Porter. “I come from the era of the combat zone, era when young girls were charged with prostitution,” and their pimps and johns were able to buy and sell sex with children with impunity. Porter was targeted by a pimp as a young teen and was exploited for about 15 years before a medical crisis brought her to help – and that experience is invaluable in mentoring girls who are trying to break free.

The fact that Norfolk County prosecutors do not have many of these cases entering the courts is more a concern than a cause for re-assurance, District Attorney Morrissey said. “It is happening, the exploitation is happening, but out in the communities it is too often going undetected. If it is not being reported to us or law enforcement, there is no opportunity to intervene; that is one of the obstacles we need to break down.”

“Prostitution has gone indoors,” Grace said. “Girls are sold on web sites...girls are more invisible than ever before.”

“We are at the kind of precipice today that we were at 30 years ago in how society, law enforcement, the courts and service providers viewed domestic violence, and how all of those attitudes had to be redrawn,” District Attorney Morrissey said. “We need a new framework and a new partnership across society to deal with the rampant commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Norfolk DA’s Office, Norfolk Advocates for Children and our community partners are dedicated to pushing that forward.”



District Attorney Michael Morrissey, Center, and Norfolk Advocates for Children coordinator Michele Friel Mullen, at right, welcomed conference presenters, from left, Lisa Goldblatt Grace, State Police Sgt. Pi Heseltine, and Audrey Porter from the My Life My Choice program at the event attended by more than 80.



Rep. Timilty, who supported important recent legislation making it easier to target the adults who exploit children, joined District Attorney Morrissey at the opening of the conference.