

State Supreme Court should act to prevent online sex trafficking

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JAE C. HONG — AP

The state Supreme Court will hear arguments this morning about whether to allow a lawsuit filed on behalf of three children who were sold for sex to the highest bidders on Backpage.com, a website known for facilitating the trafficking of young girls and boys. The court should allow the lawsuit, and put an exclamation point on their decision.

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The court has an opportunity to stop this modern day slavery and send an important message to Congress.

The case involves three young victims. One was 15 and two were seventh graders when pimps started advertising them for sale to adult men, who raped them. These are children, too young to give consent.

Lawyers for Backpage.com will argue that Section 230 of the federal Communications Decency Act (CDA) protects them from liability because the ads are placed by a third party. The court should reject this argument, and confirm the ruling of Pierce County Superior Court that the website is not entitled to federal immunity under the CDA.

The purpose of Section 230 was to protect websites and other online services from liability for material posted by other people. But those free speech rights should not be extended to websites that promote child prostitution or other criminal behavior.

The court must stop this travesty. Rejecting Backpage.com's argument will pressure Congress to fix the CDA by requiring websites to prove the age of all people depicted in sex-related advertisements.

Congress should also create the legal means to prosecute websites that aid sex trafficking. Further, it should pass legislation mandating that law enforcement and child services classify sexually exploited children as victims of abuse. How else could you describe a 12-year-old girl who is beaten, tortured and threatened into selling her body multiple times per day?

Backpage.com must be held accountable for the harm it has enabled others to cause.

Read more here: http://www.theolympian.com/2014/10/21/3380606_rule-to-prevent-online-sex-trafficking.html?sp=/99/109/&rh=1#storylink=cpy