

# Washington Supreme Court set to hear Backpage sex trafficking case

By [Christina Salerno](#) | October 20, 2014 | 0 Comments  
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The Washington Supreme Court will hear arguments Tuesday in a lawsuit brought against Backpage.com by representatives of three teenagers who say they were trafficked for sex on the website.

Lawyers for the sex trafficking victims allege that Backpage is liable for creating an online marketplace for sex, and for contributing to some of the content of the ads by posting certain guidelines. Backpage argues it is immune under the 1996 federal Communications Decency Act, which says that an Internet service provider is not liable for the content posted by users.

TVW will air the arguments live at **2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 21.**

The victims were runaways between the ages of 13 through 15 when they were initially trafficked on Backpage by a pimp, according to court filings. The victims allege that Backpage never attempted to verify their ages, and they say they were raped numerous times as a result of the online escort ads that were posted and paid for by the pimp.

They argue in court filings that Backpage contributed to the content of the ads by “providing phoney posting rules and content requirements to instruct sex traffickers not to use certain words and graphics in order to avoid growing scrutiny by the public and law enforcement.”

The pimp who trafficked the girls was convicted in 2011 and [sentenced to 26 1/2 years in prison.](#)

Backpage attorney Liz McDougall told TVW it was premature to comment on the lawsuit. However, in an email she said that Backpage fights child trafficking with “approximately 100 staff dedicated to operating a 24/7 triple-tier prevention system (including an automated filter and two levels of human review).”

McDougall said “identifying and vilifying a single U.S. website (previously craigslist, now Backpage.com) as the cause of the problem and the key to the solution are ill-founded and unproductive,” and will result in children being trafficked on offshore websites that are outside the jurisdiction of U.S. law enforcement.

A Pierce County Superior Court judge denied a motion by Backpage to dismiss the case under the Communications Decency Act. Backpage appealed, and the Washington Supreme Court accepted review of the court’s decision.

If the Supreme Court agrees with the victims, then Backpage could be denied immunity and required to pay damages, according to the state Attorney General's Office, [which filed a "friend of the court" brief in the lawsuit against Backpage.](#)

Read all the [court filings here.](#)