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PR Newswire

NEW YORK, June 14, 2012/PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- On June 20, 2012 between 5 and 7 PM the **Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW)**, **Prostitution Research & Education (PRE)** and over **100 national and international co-sponsors, and counting**, will protest Village Voice Media Holdings, LLC (VVM) in front of its New York City office (36 Cooper Square), for its facilitation of sex trafficking through its website Backpage.com.

A large portion of VVM's profits arise from its facilitation of sex trafficking. VVM mainstreams online pimping - providing a vehicle for sex traffickers to reach buyers of human beings for prostituted sex. By providing traffickers and johns with a virtual red light district, VVM is aiding, abetting and enormously profiting from sex trafficking. "There are now many documented cases of sex trafficking directly facilitated through Backpage.com. Village Voice Media is partly responsible for the rank exploitation that is human trafficking," says Norma Ramos, Executive Director of CATW.

Our protest is **co-sponsored by over 100 leading human rights and anti-trafficking organizations** and **prominent individuals** including **InterVarsity's New York City Urban Project, The Women's Media Center, Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, Gloria Steinem, Alicia Keys, Ambassador Mark Lagon, Aaron Cohen, Frederick Douglass Family Foundation, Temple Committee Against Human Trafficking, Aboriginal Women's Action Network, Geebo.com, and A Call to Men.**

Sex trafficking is fueled by the demand for prostitution along with the anonymity and impunity of buyers that websites like Backpage.com provide. According to Melissa Farley of PRE, "Most prostitution is advertised and negotiated online today. That happens because of online pimping. It's time to hold the pimps, johns, and their financial infrastructure accountable for the damage they cause to human beings."

Some have argued that if newspapers like Village Voice are to survive, it's inevitable that somebody will be sexually exploited. We disagree. Publishers of online and print classifieds must take responsibility for the ads they choose to publish and profit from. If they refuse to, their advertisers can take responsibility. Corporations including T-Mobile, Starbucks, Barnes & Noble, and Macy's have pulled their advertisements from VVM in protest of Backpage.com's facilitation of sex trafficking.

"Online pimping through Backpage.com in Australia makes it clear that the state governments that legalize prostitution have no control over the violence and crime that is endemic to the prostitution industry," says Sheila Jeffreys, Director of CATW-Australia.

Attorneys General from 48 states describe Backpage.com as a sex trafficking hub and call on Village Voice Media to cease being a vehicle for and profiting from human trafficking. VVM is turning a deaf ear to this clear and unified directive from law enforcement. The purpose of our protest is clear: "We are sending a message to Village Voice Media that by hosting these ads,

they are at odds with the human rights community," says Ms. Ramos. "The question now remains, will VVM continue to choose *profits* over human rights *principles*?"

"By refusing to stop the facilitation of sex trafficking, Village Voice is making the same ruthless choice that has been made since the beginnings of slavery - profits are more important than human lives," says Robert Benz, Founder and Executive Director of Frederick Douglass Family Foundation and lead organizer of the protest at the VVM headquarters in Phoenix, AZ taking place from 7 to 9 AM on the same day.

"If a dog bites someone, we hold the owner accountable. But if a man pays to rape a 14 year-old, Backpage is just meeting quotas for shareholders," says Jonathan Walton, Director of InterVarsity's New York City Urban Project and one of the lead organizers of the New York City protest. It would be an act of **corporate responsibility** if VVM ceased facilitating sex trafficking thereby helping us to create a sex trafficking free Internet.

There will be a press conference at 5:30 PM at the protest. Speakers include: Stella Marr of *Survivors Connect Network*, Sonia Ossorio of *NOW-NYC*, Cherie Jimenez of *Kim's Project*, Joy Friedman of *Breaking Free*, Jonathan Walton of *InterVarsity's New York City Urban Project*, and Aaron Cohen, activist and author of *Slave Hunter: One Man's Global Quest to Free Victims of Human Trafficking*.

SOURCE Coalition Against Trafficking in Women