

## EDITORIAL

# Minnesota focus on sex traffickers yields imprisonments

Increase in prosecutions statewide is a measure of Safe Harbor success.

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Last month, a St. Paul man convicted of victimizing seven women received the longest prison term in Minnesota history for sex trafficking. Rashad Ramon Ivy, 35, was sentenced to a little more than 58 years for trafficking, soliciting prostitution and criminal sexual contact.

That case was part of a significant increase in sex trafficking prosecutions across the state. More of the criminals who abuse young people and force them into sex acts are going to jail, thanks to several years of statewide efforts to raise awareness, change attitudes and offer training about the exploitation of those who become sex workers. The hike in prosecutions is one indication that those efforts are working and ought to be continued and expanded.

The enforcement push began in 2005, when the Legislature began requiring periodic reports on human trafficking from public safety. A few years later, state statutes criminalizing the promotion of prostitution were amended to include trafficking. In February 2011, a number of county attorneys announced that they would use their discretion to stop charging those under 18 with prostitution. Then later in 2011, Minnesota's Safe Harbor Law was enacted; statewide, exploited children were no longer criminals. Rather, they are rightly considered victims and are directed to services and support instead of jail.

As part of that change, the criminal justice system was redirected to focus on the pimps and abusers who profited off the victims. So in 2013 the Minnesota Legislature tasked the Ramsey County attorney's office with providing training to law enforcement, prosecutors and others in support of Safe Harbor.

Since then the county attorney's office has trained more than 1,700 officers in 33 cities using \$700,000 from the Legislature and \$70,000 from the Women's Foundation of Minnesota. The result: In 2007, there were 29 charges statewide in sex trafficking cases, compared with 75 in 2015.

With bipartisan support, the 2016 Legislature wisely approved increasing state spending on Safe Harbor-related efforts to \$13 million by 2018. Those dollars pay for training as well as support and shelters for victims. Clearly, as the prosecution increase indicates, the funding makes a difference in taking more predators and traffickers off the streets and helping young people escape exploitation.