

**NEWS RELEASE**  
July 10, 2015  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Taryn Offenbacher  
602-818-3955  
taryn@sharedhope.org

## **495 Child Sex Trafficking Victims Linked to Backpage.com; Visa, MasterCard, AmEx Cut Ties With Site**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Last week, Visa, MasterCard, and American Express announced that the companies will no longer be a payment option on Backpage.com, an online classified site highly criticized for its role in facilitating child sex trafficking. According to Shared Hope International, 495 victims of child sex trafficking in 46 states and D.C. have been linked to Backpage.com. A study by YouthSpark in Atlanta, Georgia, found 53% of children receiving care from service providers across the country were bought and sold for sex on Backpage.com. With the recent decision of Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, many are wondering what's next for Backpage.com and its impact on the future of the child sex trafficking industry.

Backpage.com has been at the center of national advocacy efforts for years, with thousands calling on the site to shut down its adult entertainment section. In 2013, [Village Voice Media split from the online classified site](#) after many major advertisers pulled their ads from the publication because of its association with Backpage.com. [Legislators introduced new measures](#) to increase accountability of online advertisers, like Backpage.com. Forty-seven state attorneys general and the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) endorsed and sent a letter to Congress [advocating to amend the Communications Decency Act](#) of 1996 (CDA) to remove the barrier to state prosecution of online businesses in violation of trafficking and prostitution offenses. Three [sex trafficking victims recently appealed the dismissal of their lawsuit](#) against Backpage.com, alleging that the site violated state and federal sex trafficking law. At least one prior case was brought against Backpage.com, in which it was able to prevail by hiding behind unintentional protections granted under the First Amendment and the CDA. This week, [Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey called on Backpage to shut down its adult entertainment section](#) after 28-year-old Daniel Tejada was indicted in the strangulation of 24-year-old Ashley Masi. Tejada found his victim through an adult entertainment ad on Backpage.com.

Though efforts to pressure Backpage.com to shut down the adult entertainment section of the site have continued for years, the recent withdraw by credit card companies, at the request of Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, may impact Backpage.com's pressure point: revenue. According to a spokesperson for Dart's office, Backpage.com rakes in [\\$9 million a month](#) from the adult entertainment ads alone. In 2013, the site raised its prices, generating a [55 percent increase in revenue](#) the first month. In response to the recent shift in payment options, Backpage.com has temporarily allowed free basic ad posting. For users looking to upgrade their advertisement (i.e., automatic reposting or sponsored placement), Bitcoin, digital currency, is the only payment option. While free ads may trigger an immediate spike in new advertisements, the strategy could yield a long-term win for advocates if the company cannot identify an equally convenient alternative payment option.

"Backpage.com has one evident motive—revenue," Linda Smith, President and Founder of Shared Hope International said. "Regardless of their intent, Backpage.com's woeful supervision of the content of their site has enabled child sex trafficking. If law suits, legislation, letters, petitions, and now a murder won't sway them to close down the adult services section, perhaps a hit in the pocketbook will."

### **Media Contact**

Taryn Offenbacher  
Communications Director, Shared Hope International  
602-818-3955 cell  
[taryn@sharedhope.org](mailto:taryn@sharedhope.org)

ABOUT SHARED HOPE INTERNATIONAL: Shared Hope International leads a worldwide effort to prevent, restore, and bring justice women and children exploited through sex trafficking. For more information about Shared Hope International, visit [www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org).

###