



**Mike McGinn, Mayor**  
City of Seattle

August 5, 2011

Carl Ferrer  
Vice President  
Backpage.com, LLC  
Phoenix, AZ 85034

Dear Mr. Ferrer,

Thank you for your letter of August 4, 2011. We appreciate that Backpage.com has taken some significant steps to monitor and deter child sex trafficking on its “adult” services advertising platform. We are concerned that your plans for age verification continue to fall short of what is needed to solve the problems identified by Seattle Police.

In our meeting of July 15, we emphasized that in-person age verification with a signed model release is the single most effective means of ensuring that persons appearing in adult services ads are of legal age. Our law enforcement officials concur on this point. Seattle Police have identified an alarming number of juvenile prostitutes advertised on Backpage.com since January 2010. Other local advertising companies that require in-person age verification do not appear to attract comparable levels and types of criminal behavior. We explicitly reiterated these points in our telephone call last Friday.

Your letter likens Backpage.com to “other legitimate service providers,” including cell phone companies, credit card companies, and “technology giants such as eBay, Google and Facebook [who] have all seen their services wrongly utilized by criminals.” In this vein, you suggest that requiring in-person age verification for your site would be analogous to requiring users of Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter to drive to a brick-and-mortar building to post new material on the Internet.

Respectfully, we think you are glossing over a significant fact – the “elephant in the living room,” in your phrase. Your company is in the business of selling sex ads. Whereas cell phones, search engines, or social networking sites might be used occasionally or incidentally in a criminal enterprise, your services are a direct vehicle for prostitution, which is routinely associated with juvenile trafficking and exploitation. It is not unreasonable to ask that you devote a higher degree of care to screening ads for these services.

You repeatedly state that this issue requires a “Web-based solution” because it is a “Web-based problem.” This is a convenient way to justify your particular business model, but it’s simply not true. This is not a problem that is confined to cyberspace. Your practices are having a real impact on real people – on children here in Seattle and across the country. We believe you have a moral responsibility to step up and provide real solutions.

Seattle City Hall, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
600 Fourth Avenue  
PO Box 94749  
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

Tel (206) 684-4000  
Fax (206) 684-5360  
[www.seattle.gov/mayor](http://www.seattle.gov/mayor)  
[mike.mcginns@seattle.gov](mailto:mike.mcginns@seattle.gov)

Carl Ferrer  
August 5, 2011  
Page 2

I have asked Seattle Police to further review the on-line technologies you have identified, but I believe these should be a supplement, and not a substitute, for in-person age verification. I have also asked for further review of your ongoing work in the areas of web site monitoring, employee training, and law enforcement assistance, and will provide additional feedback on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike McGinn". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Mike McGinn  
Mayor

Attachment:

Copy: Councilmember Tim Burgess  
Chief John Diaz  
Capt. Dave Emerick  
Lt. Eric Sano  
King County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg

MM/cjm