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By [Lauren Rankin](#)[RSS feed](#)

Ending Demand for the Sex Trade in Illinois

CAASE helps citizens take action against forced prostitution

Until I began working with the [Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation](#) (CAASE), I was unaware of the reality of the sex trade in Chicago. My perception of prostitution was typical, I think. Our culture perpetuates the myth that women are in prostitution by choice and could leave to do something else with their lives at any time. This idea completely alleviates the men who buy sex from any responsibility for their part in fueling the sex trade. The truth is that prostitution could not exist without purchasers, or the men who create the demand for paid sex. Without demand, there would be no prostitution.



While working with CAASE and their [End Demand Illinois](#) (EDI) campaign, I've been confronted with a more realistic view of the sex trade. Women are often in prostitution because they have no other viable options. In one study, 79% of women in prostitution gave an indication that they were in the sex trade due to some degree of force, fraud, or coercion. Pimps intentionally seek out society's most vulnerable girls and women including those who have been sexually, physically or emotionally abused, those in poverty or runaways.

Violence against women in the sex trade is also appallingly pervasive, and yet our society has yet to stand up against the people who fuel the sex trade and commit this violence: pimps, johns, and traffickers. This violence occurs on the street, in brothels, in drug houses, in escort services, and in exotic dancing venues. According to a study from local researcher Jody Raphael, most women in prostitution are subjected to high levels of violence, whether they were on the streets or "indoors." In fact, half of the women in escort services reported being raped. There is no safe place to be a prostituted woman. The cinematic image of Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* standing on a street corner, romantically whisked away by Mr. Right is a complete contradiction to what these exploited women face every day.

The End Demand Illinois campaign raises awareness about the role that purchasers (often referred to as "johns"), pimps and traffickers play in perpetuation violence against women in the sex trade. The people who create the demand for the sex trade are making human beings into commodities. They are buying and selling someone's sister, daughter or friend.

Johns are the most frequently identified perpetrators of violence against women in prostitution, yet they rarely, if ever, face arrest or prosecution. Women in prostitution have historically been the only targets of law enforcement "stings." Another goal of End Demand Illinois is to shift law enforcement's attention to sex traffickers and the people who buy sex, while also proposing a network of services for survivors of prostitution.

In recent years, there have been some notable steps forward. EDI partnered with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office to pass the [Illinois Safe Children Act](#), which ends the practice of prosecuting minors in Illinois for prostitution. This bill also raised the level of legal penalties for pimps, johns and traffickers, an imperative part of curbing demand. We are beginning to see signs that law enforcement is focusing on demand. Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez and Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart have stepped up as important leaders in this effort, building cases against local traffickers and pimps. State's Attorney Alvarez was the first to use Illinois' trafficking law, though it had been in existence since 2006.

There is much more work to be done. Initially, learning about this reality can be quite daunting and overwhelming. You can't help but think, what can I possibly do to help this enormous problem? **But it is important to remember that we are not powerless. We have the ability to fight the demand.** Simply raising awareness is an important step toward eradicating the exploitation of women in the sex trade. Challenge your own preconceived notions about prostitution. Talk to your friends, your family, your congregation, your school.

Need a place to start? In an effort to empower the public to fight demand, CAASE has created toolkits to

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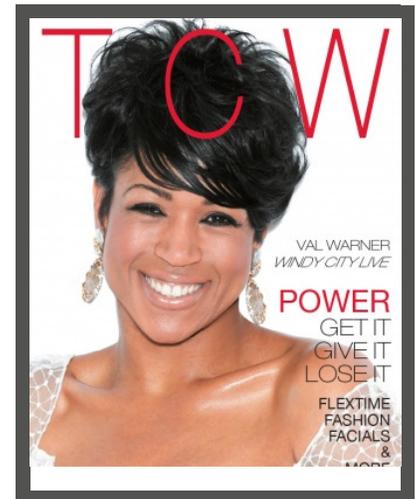
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empower communities to take action. Each toolkit is a free, extensive guide for parents, college students, faith-based organizations, businesses, teachers, and other groups. CAASE is dedicated to building communities free from sexual exploitation, and you are a crucial part of that effort. You have a voice and you have the power to help end sexual exploitation. To get started, sign up for our End Demand Illinois action alerts at www.enddemandillinois.org/subscribe.

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