

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS book is seen through my lens as a former prosecutor. The case information herein is public record. I have added to it my personal experiences and opinions. My focus is on female survivors of sex trafficking, based on the specific investigations I discuss, but there are also male, transgender, and gender nonconforming victims of sex trafficking being exploited in the United States every day. Additionally, this book focuses solely on sex trafficking, but equally egregious human trafficking is also occurring in many other industries, from restaurants and nail salons to garment factories and farms. Like sex trafficking, what's commonly referred to as labor trafficking is an extreme form of exploitation in which a victim is forced to work with little or no pay and is not free to leave. It is not the nature of the "labor"—whether it is sex acts or farm work or washing dishes—but the exploitation, the working conditions, the fear, and the lack of freedom that define human trafficking, which is widely referred to as modern-day slavery. As evinced during our investigations, many of the survivors of child-sex-trafficking come from unstable home environments or have suffered from sexual abuse as a child. Such circumstances have impacted their self-esteem and made them more vulnerable to predators. Because of underreporting, it is difficult to accurately define the scope of child sex trafficking in the United States.¹ In 2019 alone, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children received reports on more than 10,700 children.²

I also want to recognize the growing movement of those who believe commercial sex should be decriminalized or even legal-

ized. Indeed, it's important to acknowledge that not all commercial sex work advertised on the internet or anywhere else involves trafficking and exploitation. Sex trafficking should not be conflated with voluntary sex work.

This book is not about consensual sex work. It is about rape.

Those who want to see prostitution decriminalized or legalized have criticized the shutdown and prosecution of Backpage, claiming that this has made commercial sex more dangerous. The statistics don't bear this out. As a prosecutor, I saw firsthand the numerous rapes, robberies, and murders that occurred through Backpage. There was no screening, no criminal records check, no security provided. It was merely a criminal marketplace where people were sold. There was no way of knowing who would be at the other end of a call or text. Backpage made sex trafficking easy and lucrative.

The survivors who were part of the Backpage case were forced into sex trafficking, most of them as children. Their names have been changed in this book to protect their privacy. They were sold in multiple cities and sometimes in multiple states. They suffered long-term consequences and scars that will never heal. Those who escaped sex trafficking continued to suffer physically and mentally, struggling to overcome fear, anxiety, and sometimes drug addiction. And some victims of sex trafficking do not survive.

To be clear, Backpage never made any aspect of their lives safer. Backpage increased their suffering exponentially, made it harder to escape, and made more money for their traffickers. After the shutdown of Backpage, instances of sex trafficking decreased.³ While other websites have emerged or expanded, there is no longer a centralized site where the sale of children is normalized.

Those who choose to engage in commercial sex work are just as deserving of law enforcement protection as the countless victims who are trapped in it. Research shows there are numerous health risks associated with engaging in commercial sex, which correlates with violence and homicide rates higher than those

for the general public. Sex workers should not be stigmatized, ignored, or deterred from seeking justice. But that is a different book. The focus of this book is sex-trafficking victims and at-risk children who have been sexually abused—and what we did to stop it.

