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## Sen. McCaskill conducts hearing on sex trafficking investigation

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WASHINGTON- Senators Claire McCaskill and Rob Portman held a hearing Thursday on its sex trafficking investigation of Backpage.com, an online advertisement site. The investigation looked into Backpage.com's adult services advertising pages.

Yiota Souras, senior vice president of the National Center for Exploited and Missing Children (NCEMC), testified 71 percent of child sex trafficking reports submitted to the NCEMC tipline relate to Backpage.com. Souras cited several Backpage.com business practices inconsistent with the center's standards.

"Backpage does not consistently or uniformly take down ads from its site when the ad is reported for potential child sex trafficking," Souras said. "Backpage does not appear to search and does not report ads linked by a name, photograph, email address, telephone number or credit card to a previously reported child sex trafficking ad."

Deputy Attorney General Darwin Roberts said, although Backpage isn't the only site with adult services advertising, the business appears to be the leader in that space.

"Although there are many websites that host "escort"/prostitution advertising, Backpage.com appears to play an especially significant role in the sector," Roberts said. "According to various media reports, Backpage.com became a market leader for "adult services"-type advertisements in the wake of Craigslist's 2009 decision to end its adult services advertising."

McCaskill said Backpage has not shown any effort in preventing sex trafficking because it has built a strong business on the ads.

"We have received information indicating that Backpage a hugely successful business, in part by posting advertisements of children and other victims of human trafficking on its website," McCaskill said. "Despite knowing that its website has hosted advertisements of children being sold for sex, Backpage has apparently signaled to its moderators that those ads should remain on the site."

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center said there were 290 calls regarding human trafficking and 55 cases of human trafficking reported in Missouri in 2014. The NHTRC said 39 of the 55 cases were related to sex trafficking and nine were related to labor trafficking. Nanette Ward of the Central Missouri Stop Human Trafficking Coalition said the hearing is one step in the right direction to stopping human trafficking.

"It's important that we continue educate young children on the dangers of human trafficking and understand that the demand for these services is still there," Ward said.