

Summary of 2022/2023 Anchorage Police Department Prostitution Records Request



The Community United for Safety and Protection (CUSP) is a group of current and former sex workers, sex trafficking survivors, and allies working towards safety and protection for everyone in Alaska's sex industry. Learn more at www.SexTraffickingAlaska.com

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The Records Request

On September 27, 2022 CUSP made a public records request of the Anchorage Police Department, asking for “all MOUs, contracts, letters, emails, grants, reports, and financial documents mentioning or pertaining to prostitution or sex trafficking since 2017.” We did not request police reports. On March 16, 2023 we paid an invoice of \$602 for these records. On June 23, 2023 we were provided with a downloadable folder containing one spreadsheet and nine police reports, which we had not requested. We did not receive any of the information we requested. We are unsure if this is due to a reading comprehension issue at Anchorage PD or if they intentionally provided us with the wrong records.

Why Are Sex Workers Doing Research?

We often hear police talk about prostitutes as if they know more about our experiences than we do. We believe that as the people who are being discussed, policed, and legislated about, our information and understanding are important and valuable. Unfortunately, because of the criminalization of prostitution most of our “bosses” - the lawmakers who make the laws that create our work conditions - will never hear from us directly. Instead they hear from police and NGO workers whose jobs often depend on our continued criminalization. This is a very small bit of research, but we use research like this to bring the experiences and voices of our criminalized community to lawmakers and the public.

Next Steps

The CUSP board decided to create this descriptive report based on the records we did receive, as they so accurately depict some of our community’s experience with police. The police reports were read and analyzed by a focus group of three Alaskan prostitutes¹ with a combined 70 years of experience in sex industry.

The Spreadsheet

The spreadsheet showed that between January of 2017 and December of 2022, a total of six years, the Anchorage Police Department had 31 calls related to prostitution. Twenty four of those calls originated with Vice, one with a report of abuse, two with reports of drugs, one with a report of rape, one with a report of “ROB” (robbery), and two with reports of suspicious behaviors.

¹ You should call us sex workers, but we can call ourselves prostitutes. We use this term because we are talking about the enforcement of the prostitution laws.

Original Call Type with Final Nature of Call													
Jan. 1, 2017-Dec 31, 2022													
Final Call Type	Original Call Type											Grand Total	
	ABUSE	ASS	ASSIST	DRUGS	RAPE	ROB	SAM	SUSP	THREAT	TRES	VICE		
PROSTITUTE	1			2	1	1		2				24	31
HUMAN COMM	1	1	1			1		2		1		3	10
SUSPICIOUS												6	6
HUMAN SERV	1				1		3				1		6
PROST JOHN								1		1		4	6
WARRANT												3	3
AGENCY ASST												3	3
DUP/ERROR												2	2
THEFT												1	1
ALL OTHER												1	1
SOLICIT												1	1
Grand Total	3	1	1	2	3	1	3	5	1	2	48	70	

A second chart on the same page gives numbers by year and month.

Prostitution Reports														
Jan. 1, 2017-Dec 31, 2022														
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Grand Total	
2017			2	1	1	1	2			6	1	2	2	18
2018	2		8		1		3		2	3	1			20
2019	2			1	2	5	1	1						12
2020						2	3	1		2		1	2	11
2021			2				2			2	1		1	8
2022											1			1
Grand Total	4	12	1	3	3	12	6	4	13	4	3	5	70	

Another page of the spreadsheet lists 20 prostitution incidents occurring between 2020 and 2022, which is consistent with the second chart. This page shows nine incidents being releasable, six requiring a juvenile release form, and five being non-releasable due to being open in court or at APD.

Police Reports

One of the nine police reports we were provided with did not mention or seem to imply anything related to prostitution.

Eight reports did mention prostitution.

2020: OCS

Summary

In the first report, Officer Clark notes that he was told by Detective Torres of the Anchorage Police Department that there had been a tip by the Office of Children’s Services of a mother who was possibly practicing prostitution out of her household, including the mother’s stage

name. Officer Clark describes finding the woman's advertisement and tricking her, via text, into believing that he was a client who would pay \$500 to meet for two hours.

"I'm not a cop," Officer Clark texted her twice. Eventually Officer Clark arrived at the parking lot where he was to meet the woman. He observed her talking on the phone with him and confirmed that the woman in the escort ad was indeed the mother reported by OCS. He did not see any children or any indication that children were exposed to prostitution.

Officer Clark passed this information along to Detective Torres and the case status was recorded as 'Forwarded to OCS.'

Discussion

Members of the focus group were alarmed to see Detective Torres apparently participating behind the scenes in decisions about whether a mother should lose her children because of her job. They noted that Detective Torres' name often comes up in discussions about the most horrendous things police do to sex workers. It is scary to think that people with so much power believe that sex workers should not have our children.

Police often call prostitution a "crime of dishonesty" but we find our profession to be quite honest when compared with police, who are always trying to trick us into thinking that they are actual clients. We are glad that Officer Clark did not trick this woman into having sex with him and then take the money back. We hope that after hiring a babysitter to meet him and then not being paid the money he had promised she could still afford to take care of her children and hire a babysitter in advance of her next client.

2020: Robbery

Summary

In December of 2020, a woman dialed 911 to report that a man had pointed a gun at her and tried to rob her. Officer Musgrave went to the hotel where she was staying and asked her if she were going to provide sexual favors to the man who pointed a gun at her and tried to rob her. She said that she was not, and then that the man had propositioned her for prostitution and she had refused before he pulled the gun on her.

Security video from the hotel showed that she had been in the man's car and appeared to give him oral sex. Officers contacted the man, politely not waking his wife, and he told them that the woman was a prostitute and that she had tried to rob him before he pointed a gun at her.

Officers determined there wasn't "enough clarity to find probable cause for a Robbery."

Discussion

This case reminds us of the current ongoing trial of Brian Steven Smith, who was convicted of murdering two Anchorage sex workers. In that case, like this one, the reporting sex worker did not know that Alaska has immunity from prostitution charges for sex workers and sex trafficking survivors reporting serious crimes. In both cases the sex workers took steps to conceal the fact

that they had been engaging in prostitution from police and in both cases this was an obstacle to investigation and prosecution.

In 2016, when we achieved the immunity provision in Alaska law, CUSP asked that then Governor Walker and the state Attorney General make a public statement about this groundbreaking legal protection for criminalized workers, whose lack of equal protection under law makes us more vulnerable to violence and, in the case of Alaska v Brian Steven Smith, murder victims. They did not, and the lack of common knowledge of the immunity provision continues to impede investigations into serious crimes like serial killers and robberies.

2020: Anchorage Neighborhood Health Reports Victim to Police

This report defies description, so we will just include it here:

DISPATCH/NOTIFICATIONS:

On December 16, 2020 at 1218 hours, an employee of Anchorage Neighborhood Health called APD Dispatch to report a client [B- Name Conf] made statements indicating she was the victim of sex trafficking. OFC DUNCOMBE contacted the employee and requested other officers contact [B- Name] at the Downtown Soup Kitchen. I was dispatched to contact [B- Name] at the soup kitchen. APD Dispatch advised [B- Name] had a misdemeanor arrest warrant.

ARRIVAL/OBSERVATIONS:

Another resident pointed out [B- Name] to me in the soup kitchen. [B- Name] was lying in her bed.

ACTION TAKEN/INVESTIGATION:

I advised [B- Name] she had a warrant that needed to be taken care of. I allowed her to put on her shoes, coat and secure her personal items in the locker. She walked outside to my patrol car where I secured her in handcuffs. With WatchGuard recording and OFC JOY observing I pat searched [B- Name]. I secured [B- Name] in the back seat of my patrol car.

Discussion

Medical and other professionals should **never, ever, ever call the police on their clients for being victims**. It ALWAYS needs to be a victim's choice whether they want to engage with police or not. We understand that the FBI has given talks for hospital workers and other medical professionals urging them to report sex workers and sex trafficking survivors to police. These professionals need to understand that what they may have been told in a talk by the FBI is not an accurate reflection of what local police departments will do to us if they report us. We need to be able to give our doctors accurate information so that we can receive appropriate medical testing and care without being arrested. When health clinics and other professionals are associated with law enforcement it creates bad health outcomes for individuals and for public health.

2021: An Emergency Room Nurse Reports Victim

Summary

An emergency room nurse told police a patient described being sex trafficked. The patient did not want to speak with the responding officer. The officer notified Detective Torres of this.

Discussion:

It always needs to be a victim's choice whether they engage with police or not. You do not know more about police or more about the victim's risk factors or lived experience with police than they do. **Do not call the police on people for being victimized. This disincentivizes victims from seeking medical care.**

2021: Sexual Assault of a Vulnerable Individual Labeled Solicitation

Summary

A vulnerable individual reported to Officer Wang that they had been sexually assaulted by a helping professional who gave them alcohol, and that this had happened before. Officer Wang briefed Sergeant Neer, who advised that charges would have to be pressed against the alleged rapist for Solicitation, presumably because they provided the victim with alcohol before assaulting them.

Discussion

"It doesn't matter how much training officers have about sex trafficking, they can not even identify a sexual assault victim," one focus group member said.

It is as disheartening to see sexual assault trivialized and confused with prostitution as it is to see prostitution conflated with sex trafficking and sexual assault. Prostitution is consensual. Sexual assault is not. This conflation of prostitution, a profession, with sexual assault and the resulting misleading definitions of terms like sex trafficking are clearly a failed policy strategy.

2021: Police Officer as Customer

Summary

Detective Torres had placed a missing person/locate on a woman because he believed she was a trafficking victim. When patrol officers located her and Detective Torres spoke with her she explained that she was not currently a prostitute, but described a police officer and an attorney who had been her clients when she was a prostitute.

Discussion

We are not surprised by this, as all of us have had both police officers and attorneys as clients. We are again concerned by the unchecked and apparently unsupervised power that Detective Torres seems to wield over our community members.

2021: Wife Reports Husband

Summary

A woman went to APD headquarters to report that her husband had been texting and meeting up with prostitutes. She showed Officer Johnson screenshots of texts, but none discussed sex for money. The woman was sent a link to upload her screenshots on AXON (an evidence management software).

Discussion

This is a waste of public safety resources, from the officer's time to the space in the cloud based evidence management system.

2022: Military Wife Reports Husband

A woman went to APD to report that her husband engaged in "having sex with Prostitutes" a year and a half before. She has reported this to the base but they "didn't really do anything."

Discussion

This is a waste of public safety resources.

Recommendations

1. Medical and other helping professionals should never report their clients to the police for being victimized.
2. Police and the Department of Law should do press releases about Alaska's immunity from prostitution charges for sex workers and sex trafficking survivors who are reporting heinous crimes. This will remove obstacles to them receiving information about, investigating, and prosecuting predators like Brian Steven Smith.
3. Police should not trick us into believing that they are paying clients and then not pay us. This is State sponsored fraud. When we have to pay for hotel rooms or babysitters for non-showing clients, it can leave the most vulnerable among us even more vulnerable.
4. If a single police officer is going to have so much power over sex workers and sex trafficking survivors, it should be a female officer with no history of complaints or reports to other police agencies for misconduct. There needs to be an oversight mechanism to address police abuse.
5. Officers should receive training on the differences between prostitution and sexual assault.
6. Oversight is needed to ensure that the Anchorage Police Department complies with Alaska's Open Records statute and penalties should be applied as necessary..
7. Prostitution should be decriminalized so that robbers and serial killers know that sex workers have access to equal protection under the law and are not acceptable victims.

APPENDIX ONE

Transaction(s) for Reference Number R020089-092722 ✕

Transaction Type	Payment #	Invoice #	Date	Payment Method	Amount	Status
Payment	P007981-031623	INV23-R020089-2	3/16/2023	Online	\$602.00	Payment Successful

APPENDIX TWO

R020089-092722 - Police Department Public Records Request

Message History (15)

On 6/29/2023 1:55:46 PM, APD Public Records Center wrote:

Subject: [Records Center] Police Department Public Records Request :: R020089-092722

Body:

RE: PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST of September 27, 2022, Reference # R020089-092722

Dear Amber Nickerson,

The Anchorage Police Department received a public information request from you on September 27, 2022. Your request mentioned:

"To Anchorage Police Department:

On behalf of Community United for Safety and Protection, I make the following request pursuant to the Alaska Public Records Act,

Within ten (10) business days, please produce the following public records:

All MOUs, contracts, letters, emails, grants, reports, and financial documents mentioning or pertaining to prostitution or sex trafficking since 2017.

I request a waiver of all fees for this request. Disclosure of this information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of these issues and is not in my commercial interest.

However if this request is denied I am willing to pay fees up to \$50. If you estimate that the fees will exceed this limit, please inform me first.

If you have questions, you can reach me at 907-957-7352 or Amber Nickerson <ambernickerson1974@gmail.com>

Please provide these records electronic form via e-mail to Amber Nickerson <ambernickerson1974@gmail.com>"</ambernickerson1974@gmail.com></ambernickerson1974@gmail.com>

The Anchorage Police Department has reviewed its files and has located records responsive to your request. Please log in to the [Public Records Center](#) at the following link to retrieve the appropriate responsive records.

[Police Department Public Records Request - R020089-092722](#)

All releasable records are uploaded to this request. No MOUs were located in your search range. You should receive a refund of \$149.90 on the card you used for payment due to the difference in the estimated costs and actual costs.