

Jackie Lacey

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NEWS RELEASE

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District Attorney Jackie Lacey Unveils New Program Aimed at Helping Young Victims of Sex Trafficking

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey announced today an innovative new diversion program aimed at getting young victims of sex trafficking off the streets and out of harm's way.

Until now, minors between the ages of 12 to 17 who were arrested for sex-related crimes were deemed juvenile delinquents. Between 2000 and 2010, the Juvenile Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office filed 2,188 petitions against minors caught soliciting or loitering for solicitation.

Those arrested were processed through juvenile courts with little or no resources devoted to addressing the underlying issues that forced them into prostitution.

"We believe that minors who engage in sex for pay are victims not criminals," District Attorney Lacey said during a news conference. "We believe that we should help these children, not detain them.

"Today, I am pleased to announce the launch of the **First Step Diversion Program**. **First Step** is innovative alternative to prosecution."

First Step is a diversion program aimed at providing victims of sex trafficking a chance to rebuild their lives before they are charged, appear in court and are placed on probation.

Lacey said the District Attorney's Office is joining forces with the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Los Angeles County Probation Department and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services to identify girls under 18 who have been arrested for sex related offenses.

First Step will be rolled out in two Juvenile Division Branch Offices – Sylmar and Compton. These juvenile offices were selected due to the volume of arrests and because those girls arrested actually reside in that community.

A supervising deputy district attorney will be assigned to oversee **First Step** within each juvenile office.

For a period of one year, minors who agree to enter the **First Step** program will receive referral services, such as crisis intervention, sexual assault and mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, education and other appropriate social services.

The District Attorney's Office has partnered with four nonprofit, community-based organizations to provide a wide array of social services. Lacey thanked the YWCA Greater Los Angeles, Saving Innocence, the Valley Trauma Center in Van Nuys and the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking for their generous support and willingness to offer programs to help rescue and redirect victims of sex trafficking.

"I especially want to thank Faye Washington, president and CEO of the YWCA Greater Los Angeles for its \$25,000 contribution," Lacey said. "This money will be used to provide services to **First Step** participants."

At the end of the year, if the minor has successfully completed the program, the arrest that prompted the minor's entry into program will be cleared.

"We understand the enormous challenges these children face in trying to break away from their pimps and abusers," District Attorney Lacey said.

She noted that pimps target vulnerable youth -- runaway and homeless children who may have experienced trouble at home, youth with drug problems, children who have been sexually or physically abused or neglected.

"These are the victims who have been robbed of hope at a very young age," she said. "We want to stand beside these young victims and show them there is a way out if they just take the **First Step.**"

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About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to seeking justice for victims of crime and enhancing public safety. Annually, the [Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#) prosecutes more than 60,000 felonies and 140,000 misdemeanor crimes.