



ERIE COUNTY LEGISLATURE

HON. JOSEPH C. LORIGO
10TH DISTRICT LEGISLATOR
MINORITY LEADER

September 13, 2019

Hon. John Bruso
Erie County Legislature Health & Human Services Committee Chair
92 Franklin Street – 4th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Legislator Bruso,

I recently had the opportunity to meet with Eva Hassett and Amy Fleischauer from the International Institute of Buffalo. I spoke at length with them about the prevalence of human trafficking right here in Western New York. Their insight and experience helping survivors of such heinous crimes has helped save hundreds of victims trapped in an endless cycle of violence and abuse.

I respectfully request that Eva and Amy be invited to a meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee to discuss and share with us their knowledge and approach to this grave issue in our community. Eva and Amy have worked tirelessly to build a multidisciplinary team of experts that can answer any and all questions we may have. They have developed a multifaceted coordinated response plan to combat human trafficking and its effects on both communities and victims. It is imperative that we listen to what they have to share and work together to offer any support we can in our capacity as legislators.

Enclosed is an article from the Buffalo News describing just one of the horrible situations victims of trafficking can find themselves subject to. I appreciate your attention to this serious matter and look forward to discussing means of support for Eva, Amy, and all the others working to save victims of trafficking.

Sincerely,

Joseph C. Lorigo
Erie County Legislature Minority Leader

CC: Eva Hassett and Amy Fleischauer, International Institute of Buffalo

Hon. April N.M. Baskin, Erie County Legislature Chairwoman

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Prosecutor in Buffalo sex trafficking case: 'It's happening here.'

By Maki Becker (https://buffalonews.com/author/maki_becker/)

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(<http://buffalonews.com/stories/190913-prosecutor-in-sex-trafficking-case-its-happening-here>)

She met him at Narcotics Anonymous.

He befriended her, took her in when her boyfriend was going to leave her, then became her crack supplier and her pimp, teaching her how to use Backpage, an online website where sex workers advertised themselves before federal authorities shut it down last year.

"Hey guys," the woman wrote on one of her Backpage ads. "I'm here to make your day."

In federal court Thursday, the woman took the witness stand in the sex trafficking and narcotics conspiracy case against Valentino Shine Sr., who she said led her into the seedy – and lucrative – world of prostitution in Buffalo by taking advantage of her drug addiction and low self-esteem.

The woman testified before Chief U.S. District Judge Frank P. Geraci Jr. that her customers would call or text her. They ranged from a teacher who she met in his suburban home for a "date" to members of the Buffalo Sabres and Buffalo Bills, whom she did not name.

"Bills players, Sabres players, also people not famous," she said.

The woman explained Shine usually made her and other women who worked for him avoid dates at Marriott hotels, because they were often the site of law enforcement stings, but that she did sometimes meet "professional athletes" at the Marriott Harborcenter hotel.

The Buffalo News is withholding the woman's name because she has not been charged in the case and is considered a victim of human trafficking.

The trial underway in downtown Buffalo is a window into the dark and often misunderstood world of sex trafficking, Assistant U.S. Attorney Meghan Tokash said in her opening statement.

"When we think of sex trafficking, we tend to think of underprivileged countries overseas – something not happening in our own backyard. But as the witnesses will tell you over the next two weeks – it's happening. It's happening here. In our community. In Western New York. In the City of Buffalo; in the hotels along Transit

Road in Williamsville; in homes and hotels in Batavia, Lockport, Jamestown, Niagara Falls and Grand Island. And this defendant – Valentino Shine – was the master manipulator behind the entire criminal scheme," Tokash said.

"Some of the prostitution acts you're going to hear about in this trial actually happened within blocks of this very courtroom you are sitting in. And all of the participants – every woman who was exploited – every woman who was coerced into this – all were born and raised in our community. Not in Thailand. Not in India. Here in Western New York," she said.

The woman, who is 49 and is a grandmother, said she had been using drugs since she was 8 years old and was abused by her parents. She said she was 27 when she first started using crack cocaine, a drug she became addicted to quickly. It eventually consumed her life. At one point, she was homeless and lived in and out of crack houses on Broadway in Buffalo. She said she would prostitute herself, walking up and down Broadway looking for customers.

She had tried many times to get clean but would always relapse. She said she met Shine at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting and they became fast friends.

Once he took her in at a house on Minnesota Avenue, she said, she realized that he made his money by pimping out women who were addicted to either crack or heroin.

He would sometimes encourage them to get clean but at the same time he sold crack, marijuana and sometimes pills, she testified. He would also supply the women with drugs to reward them for making money from prostitution.

The woman testified she would make several hundred to several thousand dollars a night, depending on how many men she'd meet. Then she'd come home to the house she shared with Shine and eventually Shine's girlfriend, who would then take the money she earned to go shopping for clothes, including a mink coat Shine liked to wear.

Shine had control over her because he knew she was vulnerable and had nowhere to turn. He would often hit her, mostly on the head, if she broke rules.

"I was scared for my life," she said. "I always got hit in the head."

On Dec. 21, 2015, the woman testified, Shine punched her in her left eye so hard it made her wet her pants. He then made her sit in her wet pants and poured water on her, video recording the incident. "That was one of the most humiliating moments of my life," she said.

She took photos of herself which she posted on Facebook, hoping someone would believe her. She said she always went to the Family Justice Center, where advocates took photos of her injuries.

Shine's attorney Michael Stachowski raised questions about the woman's statements to law enforcement about her previous drug use and mental health history. He also asked her about her appearance on "The Jerry Springer Show," which she said was about the father of her son cheating on her. He questioned why she stayed with Shine for over a year.

"I had nowhere else to go," she said.



(https://buffalonews.com/author/maki_becker/) **Maki Becker** – Maki Becker has been a staff reporter at The Buffalo News since 2005. Before that, she worked at the New York Daily News and the Charlotte Observer.