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Press Release

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COOK COUNTY OFFICIALS UNVEIL NEW PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING INTERVENTION COURT

New diversion program will focus on treatment and services over incarceration

State's Attorney Anita Alvarez and partners in the criminal justice system and social justice community today announced implementation of a specialized court diversion program designed to transform Cook County's response to the prosecution of prostitution cases by providing trauma-based services and human trafficking-oriented alternatives for individuals charged with prostitution.

The new Chicago Prostitution and Trafficking Intervention Court (CPTIC) is a specialized deferred prosecution program that will attempt to divert offenders away from traditional prosecution and incarceration and toward treatment and services. It is designed specifically for individuals engaged in a pattern of prostitution or those caught up in sex trafficking.

The new court was initiated by the State's Attorney's Office in partnership with Cook County Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans, Cook County Public Defender Amy P. Campanelli and several Chicago-area social service providers. The program was developed with technical assistance from the Center for Court Innovation in New York and modeled after a similar successful program in Manhattan, New York, known as the STARS program.

"We know that many women involved in prostitution are victims of human traffickers or they face issues such as chronic homelessness, mental health issues or addiction and they engage in prostitution for basic necessities such as food and shelter," said State's Attorney Alvarez. "We strongly believe that this unique and coordinated initiative will bring positive results for the participants and their families, public safety, and the criminal justice system as a whole."

The new court will be the first program of its kind designed to address this issue since the Illinois Legislature approved a new law last year that eliminated felony prostitution charges under Illinois law. As a result, every prostitution case charged in Illinois is now a misdemeanor.

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The objectives of the new court program are to reduce recidivism, jail crowding and substance abuse and addiction among women engaged in prostitution and sex work. The overarching goal is to offer those facing misdemeanor prostitution charges with the tools and resources necessary to leave the life of prostitution.

Chief Cook County Circuit Judge Timothy C. Evans, who entered the order facilitating the implementation of the new Chicago Prostitution and Trafficking Intervention Court, said, "Although they come to court as defendants, persons in the sex trade are the real victims. They are in need of our compassion and help, which is why the court collaborated with our fellow stakeholders on this program. We believe that with access to appropriate services and treatment and the encouragement of the court system, clients in our new court will attain the courage and resolve to transition out from "the life," as it is called, to a new and better life."

The court program, which will be located at the Cook County Domestic Violence Courthouse at 555 W. Harrison, will include four graded levels of programming which will be offered to offenders based on their criminal background and current needs. Most defendants will be offered "deferred prosecution," where services will be made available to the defendant and charges will be dismissed if the program requirements are met.

"This new intervention court will help our clients start a new life," said Public Defender Campanelli. "It is a step in the right direction because it shifts the conversation and recognizes that these people, mostly women, are victims, not criminals. It will remove them from the cycle of drugs, abuse and exploitation, and treat them as human beings, not case numbers to be processed as offenders. I applaud State's Attorney Alvarez and Chief Judge Evans for their insightfulness and collaboration in the creation of this new alternative court."

With a focus on community involvement and assistance, the primary social services for CPTIC will be provided by the Christian Community Health Center's "Footprints" Program, with additional services coming from the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, the Salvation Army STOP-IT program and Thresholds.

Once offenders are processed, they will be offered admission into a need-based treatment and services program which is run by the service providers who will be embedded at Domestic Violence Court. Components of the treatment model will include an individual case needs assessment, HIV testing and referral to treatment, individual counseling and support, case management, group counseling and aftercare.

When requirements of the program are completed, charges will be dismissed. Offenders who refuse the initial intervention or fail to finish the program will have the option to plead guilty and enroll in an intensive treatment course as an alternative to incarceration.

In addition to hands-on treatment from service providers, those that complete the program successfully will have access to resources that will aid them in finding health insurance options, housing availability, substance abuse treatment, and educational referrals.

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