


Rochester City Court To Feature Human Trafficking Unit

 Caroline Tucker (<http://www.rochesterhomepage.net/story/caroline-tucker/d/story/kpoVPpr39EiER60J7IHWmA>)

Like 0 Tweet 0

🕒 10/02/2013 16:20 PM 🕒 10/02/2013 16:49 PM



There is a growing movement in New York State and across the country to get prostitutes off the streets and out of the legal system. Most are women who are breaking the law, but they are also victims of abuse.

"They live in a war zone; they live in an emotional war zone, a physical war zone, sexual war zone. Many of them are very afraid for their lives," Paper Bag Ladies Executive Director Jennifer Wolfey said.

Jennifer Wolfey runs the Paper Bag Ladies, an outreach organization for women and sometimes men who work off the streets.

"When someone is arrested for prostitution it is a double-edged sword; on one hand you are a criminal and the other you are a victim," she said.

Wolfey says it is a life many cannot easily turn away from.

"They are being taken around as if produce and asked to perform certain kinds of activities when they get there and it is a human trafficking issues," she said.

Now in Rochester City Court will be an alternative- a human trafficking court to help rather than punish. Judge Ellen Yacknin volunteered to oversee it.

"They keep coming back and so why keep having them come back and treat them as criminals when really the data is showing that they are victims of all of these social abuses and victims of their pimps as well," Yacknin said.

For six to eight months, those charged with prostitution can receive mental health, substance abuse and other services.

"If you do really well then you can get your case eventually dismissed, which is a huge benefit. It makes them feel powerful and that they have accomplished something because they have," Judge Yacknin said.

Wolfey says it is a chance at a new beginning.

"No matter how far down the road you have gone, you can always turn back," she said.

Judge Yacknin acknowledges that there will likely be repeat offenders. This is an effort that will take some time. Court is expected to be held the third Wednesday of the month. For more information and resources, click here. (<http://paperbagladies.org/>)

 [news headlines \(/tags?tag=news headlines\)](/tags?tag=news%20headlines)
