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Electronic billboards and tougher prosecution are two ways Minneapolis is getting tough on people who try to solicit prostitutes in the city. Clear Channel Communications is donating space on electronic billboards in the city to send a clear message to would-be Johns. The billboards feature a blurred mugshot and a reminder that Minneapolis posts photos of people arrested for soliciting prostitutes on its Web site. The billboards also include a new Web address where the public can view those mug shots, www.johnspics.org.

The Minneapolis City Attorney's office has recently changed its prosecution standards to get tougher on Johns. City Attorneys now seek convictions on all those who solicit prostitutes in Minneapolis, including first-time offenders. Previously, Johns who were first-time offenders in Minneapolis would have to complete a restorative justice and education program as part of their probation to prevent a conviction from appearing on their record. Under the new plea standards, Johns will still have to complete a restorative justice and education program, but their criminal record will now include a conviction. Restorative justice programs work with criminals to understand the personal accountability of their crimes and how it impacts the community.

"Prostitution harms the family and the entire community," said Ninth Ward City Council Member Gary Schiff, who represents a portion of south Minneapolis where police enforcement and arrests for street prostitution are high. "To those who come into Minneapolis to look for a prostitute, these billboards send a message loud and clear: You will be caught and your neighbors, your coworkers and your family will find out."

"Prostitution is not a victimless crime," said City Attorney Susan Segal. "Street prostitution damages our neighborhoods and the prostitutes themselves often are as much victim as offender. To further combat this problem we are strengthening our focus on the demand side of the prostitution equation—the Johns. With our new, tougher plea bargaining standards, we want Johns to know there are real consequences for their actions. We're also seeking legislative changes to make clear that prostitution activity involving vehicles on the street is a gross misdemeanor crime. We want the word to get out that soliciting prostitution is not okay in our city, on our streets, or in our neighborhoods."

The Minneapolis Police Department will continue to conduct its regular and unannounced "John stings" in areas where prostitution has been a problem.

"There is a long and deep history of the 3rd Precinct, especially Lake Street and E. 31st Street, being known as areas with high prostitution activity, said Minneapolis Police 3rd Precinct Commander Lucy Gerold. "Our aggressive enforcement efforts have not been enough to change this behavior. We need a campaign like this that tells everyone that these are family neighborhoods and not the marketplace for prostitution."