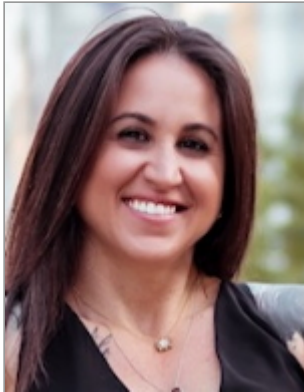


## Human Traffickers Need Customers

# Ford announces new laundromat for crime proceeds

By **Jordana Goldlist**



Jordana Goldlist

(November 29, 2019, 11:25 AM EST) -- In October, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced that he would be diverting money seized from criminals and using it to fund police initiatives. Individuals arrested for certain offences related to drug trafficking, human trafficking, fraud and/or property offences often have their cash seized by the police.

Sometimes, property such as jewelry, homes and cars are also taken. These items are typically held until the end of the case and, if the individual is convicted, then the property is often forfeited to the state as either proceeds of crime or offence related property.

When the individual is not convicted, the property improperly taken by the police is generally returned. Ford announced last month that over the next three years, \$6 million in forfeited funds will be redistributed to "help police fight crime in priority areas."

The proposal comes in the form of a grant, called the Proceeds of Crime-Front Line Policing Grant (POC-FLP Grant). According to various press releases, the grant will require municipal, provincial or First Nations police services to apply for funding in order to be considered. The government has earmarked three priority areas to focus on: 1) gun and gang violence, 2) sexual violence and harassment and 3) human trafficking.

During his announcement about the POC-FLP Grant, given at the Ontario Provincial Police annual general meeting held at Blue Mountain Village, Ford said that the more he hears about human trafficking, "the angrier he gets." As reported by Erika Engel for *Collingwood Today*, he stated: "I'd put these guys away for life. As a matter of fact, I'd probably do a lot more."

I am not sure what "more" he would do, but for someone keen on reducing spending, lifelong jail sentences cannot possibly survive a cost-benefit analysis. We can easily look to our neighbours in the south for proof that putting more people in jail does not make society safer. The United States has the world's biggest prison population, jailing more people than any other country on the planet, and it still supports a massive illegal drug trade, a booming illegal sex industry and gun violence rocks every state.

I am also not sure who Ford is referring to when he says: "these guys." I assume it is the men involved in human trafficking. I hope he is including the purchasers of sex who make woman a commodity to be exploited. Traffickers, as they are called, may be putting women up for sale, but if no one was willing to pay for sexual services, then the pimps would need to find a new product.

Pimps are not the ones creating the market, they are supplying the market created by men who believe that sex can be purchased. So long as the marketplace exists, women will be sold. No matter how many suppliers we put in prison.

What is most interesting about the proposed POC-FLP Grant is that, according to the official Ontario News press release, police services applying for funding are "required to partner with at least two community organizations from different sectors to encourage multi-sectoral collaboration (e.g. police working in partnership with community agencies to develop and implement a diversion program that helps youth exit gangs)."

Contrary to some rhetoric, diversion programs for gang members, drug dealers and human traffickers are not about being lenient on offenders or soft on crime. People often do not commit these crimes because of their character; they commit them because of their circumstance. There is nothing to suggest that lengthy jail sentences change people for the better. When we keep people caged in arguably the most violent environment in our society, only to release them back into the community without any rehabilitation or reintegration, we cannot be surprised when they reoffend.

That is the current system and it is not working. Without viable options to earn an income, individuals involved in gang-related activities will return to what they know after their jail sentence is complete. Jail, in and of itself, is not directing people to live pro-social lives.

If community groups are properly funded by the government and supported by the police, then young people looking to do better with their lives can access the job training and skills development they need to transfer their experiences into real opportunity.

The only thing missing from the equation is actual employment opportunity and this requires potential employers to take a chance on people who have been branded as "criminals." It requires an acknowledgment by the rest of society that sometimes, people who do "bad things" are not "bad people."

In fact, many have transferable skills that can guarantee success in business, marketing and sales. Giving people the ability to exit a life of crime is not only beneficial for the person, it helps their family, the community and society at large.

Certainly, there can be no harm in trying a different way, since the current system is clearly failing us all.

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