



Assemblymember Dan Quart
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Commissioner Margaret Garnett
New York City Department of Investigation
80 Maiden Lane
New York, NY 10038

Philip K. Eure
Inspector General, New York Police Department
New York City Department of Investigation
80 Maiden Lane
New York, NY 10038

Dear Commissioner Garnett and Inspector General Eure,

The NYPD Vice Squad is a traditional hotbed of corruption. With vast institutional issues and contradictory directives, it's a citywide department deserving of scrutiny. The Vice Enforcement Division is dedicated to investigating human trafficking, prostitution, and internet crimes against children, focusing on what it has labeled "victim-based crimes". Yet, if the Vice division is meant to solve victim-based crimes, why is prostitution included? It's both dangerous and offensive to conflate willing participation in the sex trade with human trafficking. Further, how do those investigations fit with internet crimes against children? Why are these crimes grouped together, and how do the Vice Squad's investigations overlap with those in the Computer Crimes Squad?

More confusingly, each Narcotics Borough has its own vice module, which investigate "prostitution, gambling, massage parlors, untaxed cigarettes and club-related issues."¹ How is responsibility divided among these separate entities? Do vice modules based in the narcotics boroughs have the same mandate to focus on victim-based crimes?

Although the NYPD has attempted to keep us in the dark, shrouding itself in secrecy, reports of wrongdoing have made their way to the surface. Just last year, scandal rocked the NYPD when retired Detective Ludwig Paz² was charged with running an expansive prostitution and gambling empire that racked up \$2 million in profit in 13 months. In November of 2017, Yang Song³ died while fleeing apprehension by Vice officers. Her family and her attorney believed she was sexually assaulted by an

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/bureaus/investigative/detectives.page>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/13/nyregion/nypd-officers-arrested-prostitution-gambling.html>

³ <https://theappeal.org/family-former-attorney-of-queens-woman-who-fell-to-her-death-in-vice-sting-say-she-was-sexually-d67461a12f1/>

officer and pressured into becoming an informant. Again, just several months before Song's death, Michael Gordan,⁴ who worked undercover, was suspended⁵ after he was found paying and participating in sex acts with sex workers his team later arrested on prostitution charges. Lawyers from the Legal Aid Society⁶ have revealed this to be a trend; their sex worker clients are often touched inappropriately, humiliated, forced into nonconsensual sexual activity, and more. This behavior is nothing new – for decades, undercover police officers have solicited sex for a fee, took advantage of unsuspecting sex workers, engaged in sexual activity, and then radioed in their squad to make arrests.

We have to accept that we are not dealing with one or two bad apples. These recurring incidents point to not only a culture of corruption and misconduct, but a consistent exploitation, endangerment, and victimization of sex workers by the NYPD. Sex workers forced to live in fear of confrontation with the police are less likely to report abuse and more likely to encounter unsafe work conditions. For undocumented immigrants participating in the sex trade, any interaction with the police stokes fear of deportation. It's the NYPD's fundamental misunderstanding of the sex trade that fuels disrespect and contempt towards sex workers.

In Albany this session, we will push for the decriminalization of sex work, the erasure of prostitution records, the expansion of vacatur for trafficking survivors, and for the repeal of loitering for the purpose of prostitution. While we work at the state level to provide protections for one of the most vulnerable working populations in the country, we realize these changes take time and will not fully address existing tensions between the police and the sex worker community.

Last March, the Department of Investigation set an important precedent: it investigated the NYPD's disastrous Sex Crimes Unit and found that the department was greatly undertrained and understaffed. Our suspicion is if the DOI looked into the practices, guidelines, and structure of the Vice squad, its findings would be similarly disturbing. Current police culture continues to fail sex workers and has left them at best, fearful, and at worst, dead. This must change. In a time of decaying public confidence in the police, we feel an independent review of the NYPD's Vice Squads is both warranted and necessary.

Sincerely,



Dan Quart
Assemblymember



Jessica Ramos
Senator



Ritchie Torres
Councilmember and Chair,
Committee
on Oversight and Investigations



Ron Kim
Assemblymember

⁴ <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nypd-allegedly-paid-sex-acts-prostitution-stings-article-1.3279082>

⁵ <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nypd-accused-sex-hookers-suspended-article-1.3433951>

⁶ <https://www.amny.com/opinion/end-nypd-vice-squad-secrecy-1.22402834>