



CITY OF HOUSTON

City Council

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Council Member
District I

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Dear residents,

I want to thank you for your patience while we work with law enforcement and other partners on the prostitution activity along the Gulf Freeway. In recent weeks, my team and I have held a series of virtual meetings with Police Chief Acevedo, the HPD command staff, and concerned residents to strategize on how to best address this situation.

Unfortunately, while not a new issue, the situation we are experiencing has largely been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In questioning some of the 'sex workers' who have been arrested, HPD investigators have learned some are here from states that haven't fared the economic downturn as well as our region.

We are aware of the problem and, like you, we are dismayed by the blatant behavior exhibited on our streets. So, here's what we're doing:

- By now some of you may have seen more HPD patrol and traffic enforcement activity along the feeder. This is not by coincidence. Some officers are in marked patrol vehicles and others are in more discreet (but marked) police units. We hope this more consistent presence will deter 'buyers', 'sex workers', and disrupt their 'business'.
- In addition to increasing police visibility, HPD's Vice unit is actively conducting undercover sting operations which have already resulted in the arrest of several 'sex workers' and 'buyers'. These undercover operations are ongoing.
- We've also engaged Texas DPS and asked for their assistance in patrolling the feeder and freeway, and we are happy to report they will be doing so as units are available. As you may know, interstate highways like I-45 are also the responsibility of the state highway patrol, and their assistance will play an important role in our coordinated effort.
- HPD's Differential Response Team (DRT) has begun addressing life safety and other code enforcement violations at businesses that may be knowingly or unknowingly facilitating criminal activity. The DRT is also looking at the potential for pursuing problem businesses as "nuisance" properties under state law, which would allow for further enforcement action and even criminal prosecution if problems persist.
- We are also considering a localized public service announcement campaign to raise awareness of commercial sex buying and sex trafficking.

These recent initiatives are in addition to the police overtime program that was funded by me with District I Service Funds. Although heavy enforcement may serve to either reduce or disrupt the activity, we are NOT going to arrest our way out of these problems.