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February 4, 2019

The Honorable Steve Sisolak
Governor of Nevada
State Capitol Building
101 North Carson St.
Carson City, NV 89701

Dear Governor Sisolak,

We are writing to express grave concerns regarding Nevada's sanction of organized sexual exploitation—that is, its legalized system of prostitution. These concerns form the basis of the decision by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation—a nonpartisan nonprofit located in Washington, DC, and dedicated to addressing the full spectrum of sexual exploitation—to name the state of Nevada to the 2019 Dirty Dozen List for its legalization of prostitution. The Dirty Dozen List is an annual campaign that names 12 leading mainstream contributors to sexual exploitation in America. In the past this list has included the likes of Backpage.com, the notorious website which promoted prostitution and facilitated sex trafficking that the U.S. Department of Justice shut down in 2018. Nevada is the first-ever state to receive the ignominious distinction of placement on this List.

As of February 2018, there were at least 21 brothels active in Nevada.¹ While some people claim that legalization of prostitution provides better regulation and increased safety, the truth is that sexual objectification, coercion, violence, as well as racism and socioeconomic disadvantages are inextricable from the prostitution experience—including Nevada's legal brothels. **Indeed, the very exchange of money (or something of value) to obtain a sex act is itself an act of sexual coercion.**

Even when it is legalized, it is impossible to disentangle exploitation from prostitution. One woman who survived being prostituted in two legal brothels in Nevada stated:

"We did not have the 'independent contractor' freedom to turn down buyers. Management required us to line up when someone arrived at the brothel. Once picked from the lineup, we would bring the sex buyer back to our room where he was allowed to do whatever he wanted with us... The violent-natured men I encountered in legal brothels are no different than the men buying sex on the streets. I cannot count the number of times I physically fought with men in the brothels and how many times I have been raped because I was too scared to fight back."²

Research confirms that the vast majority of those in prostitution (whether legalized, unregulated, or criminalized) experience, both the constant threat of and high rates of, sexual violence and even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One study interviewed 854 individuals in prostitution, including in countries where it was legal results revealed that:

- 71% physically assaulted;
- 57% raped; of those raped, 59% were raped more than 5 times;
- 64% threatened with a weapon;
- In Germany, where prostitution is legal, 59% responded that prostitution is not safer with legalization;
- 89% wanted to exit prostitution.
- Equating prostitution with death, one woman stated, “Why commit suicide? I’ll work in prostitution instead (p. 53).”³

In this same study 68% of prostituted individuals had symptoms of symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on par with that experienced by combat veterans.⁴

These kinds of violence and exploitation are inseparable from prostitution, no matter its legal status. Sex buyers do not assault or rape people in prostitution because of a legal policy, but because the purchase of prostituted persons as an act of male sexual entitlement. When a man purchases sexual access to another human being, they believe are purchasing temporary, total control. The fact that sex buyers feel a sense of entitlement and “right” to do what they please to those they engage for prostitution is born out in research, for instance:

Once a prostitute has consented to any exchange of sex for money, these women see many men as assuming that she has given up the right to refuse consent in any situation. Once her sexuality has been ‘purchased,’ her body ‘belongs’ to the purchasers to use. This was the constant theme in the interviews. Many women encountered men who treated their agreement to engage in some form of sex as permission to abuse the women’s bodies in any way they wished, as long as they gave the women monetary compensation.⁵

These quotes from sex buyers explain this even better:

- “They will do anything you ask them for with no complaints and nothing said back. ‘Your wish is my command,’ like a genie jumping out of a bottle.”⁶
- “. . . she gave up her rights when she accepted my money.”⁷
- “There are no boundaries.”⁸

In addition to the violent taking of sex from some prostituting persons through rape, it is vital to understand that the day-to-day sex of prostitution is of the same warp and woof as rape. Rachel Moran, a sex industry survivor, explains this well:

Prostitution and rape are commonly distinguished by the logical fact that to buy something and to steal something are two different things; but when we consider that the sex bought in prostitution is the same type of sex stolen in rape, sex that is, as Kathleen Barry puts it: ‘. . . disembodied, enacted on the bodies of women who, for the men, do not exist as human beings, and the men are always in control’—it is then that we understand how deeply

traumatizing it is for the woman whose body is so used. When we understand that the sex paid for in prostitution shares so many of its characteristics with the sex stolen in rape, it makes sense that so many prostituted women make clear parallels between the two experiences. One woman described her experience of the sex of prostitution very succinctly when she referred to it as: **‘Paid rape.’** Canadian campaigner Trisha Baptis, who was first prostituted as a child, describes it as **‘pay-as-you-go rape.’** Another woman described it as **‘like signing a contract to be raped’** and I wrote an article for the *Irish Examiner* in 2012 where I described prostitution as **‘being raped for a living.’** That was first said to me by another former prostitute. Many of us describe our feelings towards the sex of prostitution in these ways.⁹

Legalized prostitution in Nevada has also led to an increase (not decrease) in the state’s illegal sex trade. In fact, Nevada has the highest rates of an illegal sex trade in the country, adjusted for population—63% higher than the next highest state of New York and double that of Florida.¹⁰

At least 5,016 individuals are being sold for sex in Nevada every month—not counting those who are in brothels, escort agencies and massage parlors.¹¹ For context that means that every month, more people are being bought for sex than the population of Nevada cities such as Silver Springs or West Wendover. This dismantles the myth that legalized prostitution decreases illegal prostitution or sex trafficking.

Further, a recent audit of Nevada legal brothels in Lyon County found that 30% of the women had red flags for being sex trafficking victims.¹² This is not surprising because across the globe, legalizing prostitution has only fueled sex trafficking. A 2013 study of **150 countries** from the London School of Economics found that **wherever prostitution was legal, sex-trafficking tended to increase, not decrease.**¹³ Why? Because once something is legal, there is increased demand for it.

In addition to this inherent link between prostitution and sex trafficking, we see that the chief hallmark of the sex trade—whether legal or illegal—is a predatory dependence on people with vulnerabilities it can exploit. Individuals in prostitution, like those who have been sexually trafficked, experience a wide-range of “push factors” such as homelessness, poverty, histories of abuse (physical and sexual), and minority status that make them susceptible to sexual exploiters. Nevada’s own Dennis Hof demonstrated this connection well when in 2015 he auctioned off “America’s Next Top Bunny Ranch Virgin,” who happened to be a 20-year-old college student seeking to help her family because their uninsured house burned down.¹⁴

Given the degree of potential harm, prostitution scarcely seems like an activity that humane society would sanction in any shape or form. Yet, this is what the state of Nevada has done. Despite all the rhetoric about supporting the choices of those in the sex trade, when advocacy groups and governments normalize the sex trade, *they choose* to allow the vulnerable, desperate, and reckless to become the prey of the greedy, powerful, selfish, and lascivious. *They choose* to ensure that a pool of persons are always on supply as public, sexual property. *They* disregard the immeasurable harm to the lives of those used up as fodder in the commercial sex industry.

Thus, instead of continuing its embrace of organized sexual exploitation, NCOSE urges Nevada’s elected officials to adopt prostitution policies that combat demand (highly penalizing and reducing sex buyer behavior) and offer social services and job training opportunities to the women, men, and transgendered individuals engaged in prostitution to help them exit the industry. Several countries

such as Sweden, Norway, Ireland, France, Israel, and others have adopted just such approach known as the Nordic Model. Please make a difference in your state and join us in calling for an end to the failed policy of legalized prostitution and the adoption of the Nordic model.

Nevada is known as the state where “live free” is part of its motto. Isn’t it time that laws reflect that motto, so that all Nevada citizens can live free from sex trafficking and the sexual exploitation of prostitution? We welcome dialogue with you regarding these matters, and may be contacted at public@ncose.com or 202-393-7245.

Respectfully,



Patrick Trueman, Esq.
President & CEO



Dawn Hawkins
Sr. Vice President and Executive Director

¹ <https://nevadabrothellist.wixsite.com/list>

² Rebekah Charleston, “Human trafficking thrives in legal brothels” Reno Gazette Journal, 2018.
https://amp.rgj.com/amp/1578611002?__twitter_impression=true

³ Farley, M., Cotton, A. et al. (2003). Prostitution and trafficking in nine countries: An update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder. In M. Farley (Ed.) “Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress,” (pp. 33-74), Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jody Miller and Martin D. Schwartz, “Rape Myths and Violence against Street Prostitutes,” *Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 16, (1995):1-23.

⁶ Rachel Durchslag and Samir Goswami, “Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex,” Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, (May, 2008, p. 20).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Melissa Farley, Emily Schuckman, Jacqueline M. Goldberg, Kristen Houser, Laura Jerrett, Peter Qualliotine, Michele Decker, “Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don’t Buy Sex: ‘You Can Have a Good Time with the Servitude,’ vs. ‘You’re supporting a system of degradation,’” (paper, Psychologists for Social Responsibility Annual Conference, Boston, MA, July 15, 2011).

⁹ Rachel Moran, *Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2013).

¹⁰ The Human Trafficking Initiative, “Nevada’s Online Commercial Sex Market” Creighton University, <https://www.scribd.com/document/379531366/Nevada-sex-trafficking-study>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Rio Lacanlale, “Audit finds signs of human trafficking at brothels in Nevada county” Review Journal, 2018, <https://www.reviewjournal.com/crime/sex-crimes/audit-finds-signs-of-human-trafficking-at-brothels-in-nevada-county/>

¹³ Cho, Seo-Young and Dreher, Axel and Neumayer, Eric (2013) “Does legalized prostitution increase human trafficking?” *World development*, 41 . pp. 67-82. ISSN 0305-750X DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.023

¹⁴ “America’s Next Top Bunny Ranch Virgin, “Bunny Ranch Brothel’s One \$\$\$ Million Dollar ‘America’s Next Top Bunny Ranch Virgin!’” <http://americasnexttopbunnyranchvirgin.com/> (accessed February 6, 2016).