

#ListenToSurvivors

Open Letter from Exited Survivors of the Sex Trade

To: Criminal Justice Committee and Public Safety Committee, State of New Hampshire

Re: House Bill 287-An Act to establish a committee on decriminalizing “sex work”

We, the undersigned, are survivors of the sex trade in the United States. We are survivor leaders, activists, and advocates. Many of us are direct service providers, working on the front lines of this issue to help people survive the sex trade and to support them in their difficult efforts to leave, when they are ready.

A common misconception is that prostitution and sex trafficking are separate and not linked. In the practices and realities of the sex trade, the two are closely linked and inextricable.

“We here at the EVA Center, in Massachusetts, are very familiar with those who are behind this effort in New Hampshire. They have not been on the front lines of this fight to end sexual exploitation, nor do they have the knowledge of the economic realities that have rendered so many young women into this brutal sex trade. There has been a refusal to understand how prostitution and trafficking are intertwined. You cannot address trafficking without addressing prostitution, clear and simple. We suggest you take the lead from the law enforcement people in your state, and from Massachusetts, as well. They understand how decriminalization would be disastrous not only for New Hampshire, but for all the surrounding states.”¹

Through our combined lived experiences, we know the sex trade to be an arena where women are regarded as non-human commodities, and used and traded accordingly. Everything we have personally witnessed, including in the lives of the adults and youth we serve, has revealed to us that the majority of those within the sex trade are female and are disproportionately of color. They live in poverty, are educationally disadvantaged, and come from the most marginalized groups in society.

“When people talk about fully decriminalizing the sex trade, what they’re really saying is that it’s okay to buy people and treat them like objects. Because that’s what the majority of the sex trade is—people with money or power using a less fortunate person however they want. I can’t accept that.”²

¹ Cherie Jimenez, Executive Director/Survivor Activist, Eva Center, Boston, MA., Email, 2/11/17

² Audrey Morrissey, *My Experience in The Sex Trade Had Nothing to Do with Choice*, <https://www.demandabolition.org/blog/my-experience-in-the-sex-trade-had-nothing-to-do-with-choice/>

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The New Hampshire legislature is being hoodwinked into listening to the minority of those who report neutral experiences within the sex trade. In fact, harm, violence, and death are inherent to prostitution and human trafficking. Nearly all (92.2%) of trafficked women in one study report being subjected to physical violence, such as being shot, strangled, burned, beaten, stabbed, or punched. Many are victims of multiple forms of violence. Respondents reported an average of 6.25 of the 12 forms of violence they were asked if they had endured.³ Workplace homicide rates for women in prostitution, according to one study with a small sample, are 51 times higher than the next most dangerous occupation for women.⁴

With this political issue, you may not realize that “sex workers’ rights” are synonymous with “pimps’ rights.” Ultimately, this proposed bill will provide a platform for those who benefit from prostitution (sex buyers, pimps, traffickers, etc) and ignore and erase the sex trade survivors’ movement and our voices, which work to put an end to the wholesale dehumanization of women and girls in the global sex trade.

We urge the New Hampshire legislature to examine your proposed policy position to alter your stance on this issue and to move toward a position which puts the voices of sex trade survivors front and center. We ask this in our own names, as women who survived, and in the names of those who tried to survive.

Signed,

Alexandra Ruth Pierce

Amy Andrews-Gray

Amy Kathleen Engle

Amy Smith (survivor alias)

Angela Conn

Angelica Kauhako

Annika Mack

Athena Haddon

³Lederer, L. & Wetzel, C. (2014). "The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities." *Annals of Health Law* 23 (1): 61-91

⁴John J. Potterat, Devon D. Brewer, Stephen Q. Muth, Richard B. Rothenberg, Donald E. Woodhouse, John B. Muth, Heather K. Stites, Stuart Brody; Mortality in a Long-term Open Cohort of Prostitute Women. *Am J Epidemiol* 2004; 159 (8): 778-785. doi: 10.1093/aje/kwh110

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