

Memo of Support for House Resolution 5250

Kaytlin Bailey, and the entire team at *The Oldest Profession Podcast* strongly support House Resolution 5250, which would create a special legislative commission to ensure racial equity and study the impact of laws on the health and safety of marginalized individuals. I am the host and founder of Old Pros, a public history project elevating sex worker stories. We are currently working with archivists at Brown University to preserve the oral history of the sex worker rights movement.

We all want to end violence and exploitation in the sex industry. The lessons from history are clear, criminalizing commercial sex exacerbates all of the harms of exploitation, poverty, and gendered violence. I encourage legislators to listen to researchers and the people most directly impacted by these policy initiatives. We cannot help people we do not understand. We support the study commission to better understand the problem.

A study conducted by researchers at Baylor University and the University of California Los Angeles found that during 2003 through 2009, while indoor prostitution was decriminalized in Rhode Island, the number of rapes diminished by 31 percent and the statewide incidence of gonorrhea among women diminished by 39 percent.¹ There has also been a documented increase in exploitation and violence against people in the sex industry in Rhode Island since the passage of federal legislation in April of 2018, which limited the availability of online platforms for workers to connect, screen and schedule potential clients.²

This is a pattern that historians are familiar with, Vice commissions and moral reformers have often inflicted unintended harm on the communities they wished to help. The prohibition of alcohol did not reduce the number of bars or patrons but it pushed a lucrative industry into the hands of organized crime. Prohibition and the government's war on whisky runners ruined more lives and enriched more bullies than the alcohol trade. We do not have to repeat the same mistake with the oldest profession.

Further analysis needs to be undertaken in Rhode Island to assess laws' impact on the most marginalized communities. We support the rights of all persons to live free from violence and exploitation.

I urge you to support this crucial legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Kaytlin Bailey, host and founder of [The Oldest Profession Podcast](#) & [#OldProProject](#)

¹ CUNNINGHAM, SCOTT & SHAH, MANISHA, DECRIMINALIZING INDOOR PROSTITUTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC HEALTH (July 17, 2014). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2467633> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2467633>

² COYOTE RI, SESTA/FOSTA (July 28, 2018), AVAILABLE AT: <https://coyoteri.org/wp/sesta-fosta-death-aids2018/>