

## Steven Sepe

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**From:** Barbara Gianola <barbgianola@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 24, 2021 9:49 AM  
**To:** House Health and Human Services Committee  
**Cc:** info@coyoteri.org  
**Subject:** Letter in Support of H5250

I am a resident of North Providence, RI, a retired RI Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 50 years of community experience within inner city neighborhoods particularly in Providence, and I am writing in support of H5252.

As a social worker for the State of RI beginning in 1971, at that time I was assigned to community inner city offices. Our caseloads were keyed to the needs of children and families, and in those low income and marginalized communities I often was assigned to work with parents involved in the sex trades who were of the community.

I came to work with sex workers who had been beaten, robbed, raped and brutalized by clients but were too frightened to go to the police because they felt they themselves would face arrest and possible re-victimization. I worked with sex workers who would not follow medical treatment for life-threatening illness because they feared the judgment and stigma they might face in a medical setting. Many of these individuals had already been incarcerated for involvement in sex crimes, or had potential charges hanging over their heads, and for them the worst of their fears was that they would somehow lose their children.

Although I spent considerable time attempting to assist these clients and their families with basic human needs, I rarely came across child abuse or neglect in these particular families. Although some of my clients had criminal records, their sex trade related "crimes" had been truly victimless as far as I could see.

I came to understand how criminalization of the sex trades between consenting adults blocked the ability of these community members to meet their own basic needs and that of their families, and threatened the stability of the parent-child relationship. Criminalization causes fear and further marginalization, and literally blocks the possibility for change including through education and training, and is a tragic waste of human potential.

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