

Steven Sepe

From: ramona flour <ramonaflour@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 25, 2021 5:25 PM
To: House Health and Human Services Committee
Subject: Testimony for H5250.

I am in support of H5250.

My name is Ramona Flour and I'm a 29 year old second generation sexworker living and working in NYC. I do full service sexwork, produce pornography and work online as well. I got my start in 2012 while living in Rhode Island. I trained as a hairstylist at Paul Mitchell the School Rhode Island and I began working a full time and part time job soon after graduation & licensing. I was struggling to make my federally subsidized student loan payments. I was choosing between a winter gas bill & groceries. I cried myself to sleep because my roommate & I couldn't afford to turn our heat above 68 and our drafty row house windows left me cold and my soul crushed. I recall the feeling of profound defeat. Here I was working 6-7 days a week, with only 1-2 days off a month and I was unable to pay all of my bills. I was told my entire life the importance of education and worked tremendously hard to finish school, I forewent the Florida foster care system and my abusive family and instead intentionally exposed myself to domestic trafficking in exchange for a place to stay in a good school district, while I finished middle school. I cleaned, I cooked, I helped care for 2 adopted elementary school aged children and many of the household pets. I then went on to engage in survival sexwork to access housing so I could get my GED at 16 years old. I knew school and learning a trade was the only way I was going to rise above my situation and improve my quality of life. It was so disheartening to realize while I had done everything right, I STILL wasn't able to support myself when I was doing my very best. I don't miss cherry picking bills to pay or fearing I'll have to engage in exploitation in the beauty industry from salon owners and entitled clients to survive. In 2012 with the advice of a college student friend, I made an account at Chaturbate.com and signed online for my very first time. Chaturbate for those unaware is an adult live streaming platform. I recall my first check mailed to me being \$300 and I thought I was rich standing in front of that mailbox. I successfully went on to pay off all my student loans, get a nicer apartment in a safer area of Providence (and eventually leave RI altogether), upgrade my car after years of car repair bills eating any money I was able to scrape together, paid for long overdue medical procedures after years of not having access to medical care due to my chronic poverty as a small child. Chaturbate saved my life. I became so popular on the platform I began traveling to trade shows representing the platform. I was hired by Chaturbate's highest executive to be her assistant and worked corporate for over 3 years. I became responsible for everything from the creative direction of their marketing campaigns, hiring talent for trade shows, negotiations with adult media and event companies, social media curation, customer support tickets internally on the site, verifying ID's for new performers... I received a XBIZ executive nomination for Brand Ambassador of the year. For those who don't know XBIZ is AVN

(Adult Video Networks) biggest adult media competitor. I'd like to add I also received a nomination for an AVN as "Favorite Camgirl of the Year" for retiring from cam modeling which itself is a honor. I never imagined my dreams coming true. I never thought I'd live with the security, stability and safety I do now. I transformed my entire life by clicking that "Broadcast Now" button and I wouldn't change it for a million reasons. I grew up in rat & roach infested trailer parks primarily occupied by migrant farm workers. I remember realizing I had out earned every person in my family. I wasn't given a lot of the same privileges as others growing up... I lived in a farm house without heat, I was grateful for my free school lunch because dinner wasn't guaranteed. I didn't come from generational wealth, I didn't have loving and supporting parents, I didn't have a kind extended family to care for me. I saw my mother through bullet proof glass in a State Penitentiary, I searched for my father in my teens only to discover he was murdered by police in a mental health & drug overdose in front of his mother (she was the one who called 911) But I turned all the pain and suffering from my formative years to gold, I alchemized my soul and I used the adult industry to do it. And I refuse to share my tears any longer, take my wisdom and lived experience without stigmatizing or poorly attempting to rescue me. I rescued myself and sexwork allowed for that. I have no regrets despite the hate mail from religious extremists, the threats; the rude and cruel comments people can leave online, the protestors at adult industry events damning me to hell. The hateful anti-adult industry propaganda posted by well intentioned but very misinformed people. I've filed taxes every year since beginning my journey in the adult industry. I've contributed to a 401k, I've helped my family, I've helped my community. I've done a lot to combat the issues the industry is facing and I've done it with pride. I've found grace despite all the hate. I've maintained the self confidence to understand our society is flawed and that what I'm doing is not. I've suffered as a result but not the ways you might think. Sex work for me hasn't been harmful but what is harmful is a society that thinks because I engage in this work, I'm less than and deserve what comes to me. Stigma is real, and if this work harms me, it's in the way that it's stigma harms me. I've had an accountant fire me, my bank account closed, medical and mental health professionals stigmatize me while being incapable of non-judgemental unbiased care. I've lost friends, family and lovers due to disapproval and stigma. I've had friends get murdered and overdose due to the stigma and societal impression that says no one will care if something bad happens to one of us. I've had former partners' parents disapprove subsequently destroying my relationships. I've become a social pariah of sorts, so despite a thriving social media presence and all my success, I will never be afforded the same opportunities as say any other social media influencers. I've had my lyft (ride share app) and airbnb accounts deleted. I've faced housing discrimination and experienced job recruiters in NYC telling me I will never be represented if I choose to attach myself to the adult industry, to the very industry I used to climb out of a hole. Again, this is disheartening and ultimately it's what drives me to continue advocating, organizing and supporting the mutual aid of my fellow colleagues, community organizers & activists.

Thank you for your time in reading this testimony.

To read more of my story:

See Allure, Medium, MTV News, Rolling Stone & XBIZ:

<https://www.allure.com/story/sex-workers-internet-phone-sex-covid-19>

<https://medium.com/the-establishment/your-mother-is-a-whore-sex-work-and-motherhood-7d4fccde0bbd>

<http://www.mtv.com/news/3143241/sex-work-censorship-effects/>

<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/airbnb-sex-worker-discrimination-935048/>

<https://www.xbiz.com/features/218503/chaturbate-s-ramona-flour-cultivates-community>

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