



## **Memo of Support for House Resolution 5250**

SWOP behind Bars strongly supports House Resolution 5250, which would create a special legislative commission to ensure racial equity and the optimization of health and safety laws impacting marginalized individuals. I am the Executive Director of SWOP Behind Bars and work to provide services and support for sex workers, sex trafficking victims and survivors who have experienced arrest and incarceration.

There has been significant research on the safety and health impact of laws governing commercial sex, specifically related to violence, stigma, exploitation, and sexual health. We all want to combat human trafficking, a severe human rights violation, and must figure out the best way to diminish this incidence of abuse. Research continues to point to a correlation between repressive policing policies, diminished health outcomes and coercive work environments. A meta-analysis conducted by professors at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and other institutions reviewing over 130 studies conducted over nearly 30 years made the following critical findings: repressive policing practices of sex workers were associated with increased risks of sexual/physical sexual violence from clients or other partners and led to increased risk of infection with HIV/STIs.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> There has also been a documented increase in exploitation and violence against people in the sex industry

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<sup>1</sup> LUCY PLATT, PIPPA GRENFELL, REBECCA MEIKSIN, JOCELYN ELMES, SUSAN G. SHERMAN, TEELA SANDERS, PENINAH MWANGI & ANNA-LOUISE CRAGO, ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN SEX WORK LAWS AND SEX WORKERS' HEALTH: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDIES 45, 46 (PLOS Med. ed., Dec. 11, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> 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>

in Rhode Island since the passage of federal legislation FOSTA in April of 2018, which has limited the availability to online websites for workers.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, we have found that the lack of access to public, private and other social and health services demonstrate how the inability to assert one's rights and obtain support augments the likelihood and severity of exploitation and harms health and safety. Further analysis needs to be undertaken in Rhode Island to assess laws' impact on the most marginalized communities. We all want full realization of rights for all persons, especially the right to freedom from violence and exploitation.

I urge you to support this crucial legislation which would lead to best practices and implementation thereof in Rhode Island. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Alex Andrews

SWOP Behind Bars

[www.swopbehindbars.org](http://www.swopbehindbars.org)

[alex@swopbehindbars.org](mailto:alex@swopbehindbars.org)

877-776-2004 Ext 101

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<sup>3</sup> COYOTE RI, SESTA/FOSTA (July 28, 2018), AVAILABLE AT: <https://coyoteri.org/wp/sesta-fosta-death-aids2018/>