

Steven Sepe

From: Terra Burns <sextraffickingalaska@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 25, 2021 3:24 AM
To: House Health and Human Services Committee
Subject: Support H5250

To the members of the House Health & Human Services Committee :

My name is Terra Burns and I am a researcher and lobbyist for people in Alaska's sex trades. I am writing to you today in support of H5250.

1. There has been significant **research** conducted by COYOTE RI on the safety and health impact of laws governing commercial sex in Rhode Island, specifically related to violence, exploitation, stigma, and sexual health. In fact, some of this research was recently published in the ACLU's recent **research policy brief**. This research reflects and is validated by research all over the US and the world; for example, after years of research in countries with different laws surrounding prostitution, Amnesty International found that the best way to protect the human rights of sex trafficking victims and sex workers is to decriminalize all aspects of consensual adult sex work.
2. The criminalization of prostitution disproportionately impacts poor women, transgender individuals, LGBTQ youth, immigrants, and people of color. We need to acknowledge that criminalizing sex workers increases violence and exploitation and prevents this marginalized population from accessing the equal protections of the justice system.
3. There has been a documented increase in exploitation and violence against people in the sex industry in Rhode Island since the passage of federal legislation **FOSTA/SESTA** (see [here](#) and [here](#)).
4. A **newly published meta-analysis** of 134 studies across many nations published over a 28 year period showed increased violence and incidence of STIs in jurisdictions with repressive police practices.
5. A **study** conducted by **Baylor University's Scott Cunningham** and **Manisha Shah** of the **University of California Los Angeles** found that during 2003 through 2009, while indoor prostitution was still decriminalized in Rhode Island, the number of rapes diminished by 31 percent, and the statewide incidence of gonorrhea among women diminished by 39 percent.
6. In **New Zealand**, where prostitution was decriminalized nationwide in 2003, a comprehensive **study** by researchers from the **University of Otago's School of Medicine** found that more than 60 percent of the 772 sex workers who participated reported feeling more able to refuse to see certain clients, and 95 percent said they felt they had rights after decriminalization. Human trafficking has also diminished in New Zealand since decriminalization.
7. In the graph below you can see that RI prostitution arrests have gone down significantly since RI re-criminalized prostitution in 2009, which is evidence that trafficking is not on the rise in RI. In fact, in most **states prostitution arrests** have been significantly declining for years. In 2019 the **FBI reported** only 12 confirmed cases of domestic sex trafficking cases involving a minor for the entire country. We encourage the end to the government-funded misinformation campaigns against "people involved in the sex industry".
8. This is a short video that explains the **4 different models**.

Sex workers are part of our community and we don't want to see our community members arrested, given criminal records, isolated from their communities & continue to be discriminated against when trying to access public services. Importantly, sex workers are important partners in the work of public safety, and it decreases public safety to alienate sex workers and sex trafficking victims from police. The health and safety of "people involved in the sex industry" should be a priority for RI legislators. Everyone should have the right to report violence, abuse, and

exploitation and be able to gain access to the justice system. Policing the bodies of marginalized women shouldn't be a priority for law enforcement. Our police resources should be spent investigating violent crimes.

Please vote yes on H5250.

Sincerely,
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