



## **Testimony in Support of H.5250**

The Womxn Project is a statewide organization focused on leveraging the power of art, activism, advocacy and education to advance the principles of reproductive justice, which demands that we all have the right to determine when and how we build our relationships, families and futures and that we have the ability to live and raise our children with dignity.

We are proud to submit testimony in support of H. 5250, which creates a study commission to revise laws on commercial sexual activity. Too often laws around sex work have been based on personal beliefs and politicians' discomfort with the idea of people paying for or providing sexual services. This is not in the best interest of individuals. We need an approach that is about public health, bodily autonomy and human rights.

This bill would encourage lawmakers to take a measured and thoughtful look at how to develop and implement laws, policies and programs that center the needs of individual sex workers and balance that with any questions around the interests of the community as a whole.

As this process unfolds, The Womxn Project urges that the limits and barriers that are faced by sex workers seeking benefits or support from public programs be included. We also urge you to make sure that current and former sex workers be included in the creation and evaluation of both the study and any resulting policies. We would also encourage you to take an approach that focuses on decriminalization. It is not about making laws against commercial sexual activity less punitive or mitigating harm. It should be about truly improving the system and addressing the ways in which sex workers are denied rights in the current structures. Criminalization makes sex workers less safe by preventing them from securing police protection and by providing impunity to abusers. It does not make anyone safer, fuels mass incarceration and negative outcomes for sex workers and their families.

The bill includes language related to improving accountability of police in how they treat targeted communities. This is critical. As our country has a reckoning around police brutality and the way in which Black, Indigenous and other people of color are disparately interrogated, arrested and abused within our criminal justice system it must be noted that is especially true when it comes to transgender women who are sex workers. Transgender women of color are being killed. Transgender and gender nonconforming people are far more likely to be living in abject poverty. They are going without any access to basic medical care. We simply must do more to stand up for and

stand with transgender women of color in every sector and that includes sex work. Sex work is work.

The Womxn Project is proud to support a study aimed at improving the way that Rhode Island deals with commercial sexual activity and treats sex workers in our state and our communities.

We urge you to vote yes on this legislation and to ensure that this process be focused on protecting and respecting the rights of sex workers including protecting them from harm, exploitation and coercion; ensuring they can participate in the development of laws and policies that affect their lives and safety; and guaranteeing access to health, education and employment options. Thank you.

Contact: Jocelyn Foye, 714-501-9863, [jocelyn@thewomxnproject.org](mailto:jocelyn@thewomxnproject.org)