



Testimony Submitted to:
Rhode Island House Judiciary Committee
In Opposition to HB 8057

Bella Peracchi, Policy Associate
World Without Exploitation
Thursday, April 9, 2026

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Bella Peracchi, and I am an anti-trafficking advocate from New Hampshire and the Policy Associate at World Without Exploitation (WorldWE). WorldWE is the largest national anti-sex trafficking coalition in the country, representing nearly 200 member organizations, many of which are survivor-led and work directly to provide services and support to those in the sex trade. We unite communities across the country to advocate for policies to permanently combat human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and their underlying causes. In light of this, I urge you all to oppose HB 8057.

The global sex trade is fueled by the exploitation of vulnerable women and children by sex buyers through power imbalances and coercion. A 2024 study conducted by leading experts on prostitution reported that 98% of prostituted women had been raped by sex buyers or pimps.¹ A U.S.-based study of sex trafficking survivors found that 92% of women in the sex trade reported being raped, shot, strangled, burned, beaten, stabbed, or punched.² Violence is not an exception in the sex trade—it is the norm.

Prostitution and sex trafficking are inextricably linked. Demand from sex buyers fuels sexual exploitation and directly drives prostitution and trafficking. Rhode Island's own experience illustrates the consequences of this dangerous framework. When prostitution was legal in Rhode Island between 1980 and 2009, there was an increase in violence, exploitation, and lawlessness, leading the state to reverse the law. The Mayor of Providence even described Rhode Island as a 'true wild west', due to the heightened sex tourism and sex trafficking in the state.³ During this period, Providence was known as the 'red light district' of New England.⁴ Police officers expressed support for legislation aimed at addressing prostitution, acknowledging their inability to curb pimping and sex trafficking. Rhode Island exemplifies the dangers of demand by sex buyers, exacerbating sex trafficking.

A 2018 study of 8,000 American men demonstrates that over 20% of respondents who never bought sex reported they would if circumstances were more favorable (in other words, if the act were to go unpunished).⁵ In countries that have gone as far as to decriminalize sex buying, such as New Zealand, government data shows that the number of sex buyers on the streets doubled, and violence and sexual abuse in prostitution continued as before.⁶

¹ Melissa Farley and M. Alexis Kennedy, "Torture and Its Sequelae Among Prostituted Women in the United States," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 15, no. 1 (2024): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2024.2404307>.

² Lederer, L. and Wetzel, C. (2014). The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities. *Annals of Health Law* 23 (1): 61-91, <https://www.globalcenturion.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/The-Health-Consequences-of-Sex-Trafficking.pdf>

³ David N. Cicilline, Time to End Legalized Prostitution in R.I, PROVIDENCE J., May 19, 2009, at Commentary 6.

⁴ W. Zachary Malinowski, Sex Industry Expands at Startling Pace, PROVIDENCE J., Apr. 23, 2002, at A1.

⁵ Equality Model US, "Full Decriminalization Harms Kids," <https://www.equalitymodelus.org/take-action/full-decriminalization-harms-kids/>.

⁶ Equality Model U.S. *Equality Not Exploitation: An Overview of the Global Sex Trade and Trafficking Crisis, and the Case for the Equality Model*. November 2019. <https://www.equalitymodelus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Equality-Not-Exploitation-white-paper-November-2019.pdf>

In this national moment of reckoning, when the country is confronting the reality of how Jeffrey Epstein trafficked women and girls to powerful men who treated them as commodities, it is not the time to normalize or decriminalize the purchase of vulnerable people for sex. The lessons emerging from these revelations are clear: exploitation thrives when those with power and resources are shielded from accountability. Efforts to fully decriminalize the sex trade are often framed as protective or progressive, but they risk obscuring a harsher truth. Removing consequences for buyers does not protect the vulnerable; it expands the market that preys upon them. At its core, this is not about empowerment or choice; it is about demand and the systems that enable that demand to exploit those with the fewest options.

The only way to effectively protect people in the sex trade is to reduce the number of individuals bought and sold in prostitution while providing resources and exit strategies to help survivors leave the industry for good.

This is why we at WorldWE support the Survivor Model. This legislative framework decriminalizes people being bought and sold, prioritizes services and support instead of arrest, and holds the people causing harm, such as exploiters and sex buyers, accountable. Maine became the first state to pass this framework in 2023, and New Hampshire passed a law in 2025 that added additional fines for sex buyers while allocating those fines to fund survivor resources.

In light of this, I ask you to please oppose HB 8057. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,
Bella Peracchi