



April 9, 2026

RE: Support for H8057 - “An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses - Commercial Sexual Activity”

To the House Committee on the Judiciary,

Equality New York would like to express our strong support of H8057, which would decriminalize commercial sexual activity. Equality New York (EQNY) is a grassroots advocacy organization that advances the lives of all LGBTQI+ New Yorkers and their families. We work towards advancing equality and justice for all New Yorkers and their families, by using an ecological lens for implementing all policies, programs and projects.

Extensive research and evidence show that repealing laws that criminalize consensual adult sex work will help end human trafficking, improve public health, and promote community safety. In 2023, the “Special Legislative Study Commission Ensuring Racial Equity and Optimizing Health and Safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals” specifically recommended that Rhode Island legislators ensure that “private, consensual sexual activity remains out of the reach of criminal laws”. The Commission found that the criminalization of sex work “fuels stigma and discrimination against sex workers, which impedes their access to basic necessities, including healthcare, housing, and other social services.” Decriminalizing sex work allows workers more access to critical services without the harms of criminalization.

This bill repeals all commercial sexual activity laws while leaving laws against human trafficking on the books. This will bolster anti-trafficking efforts around the state. Prostitution laws direct law enforcement resources towards consenting adults, limiting their ability to focus on human trafficking. Additionally, when commercial sexual activity is illegal, it continues to happen - but its criminalization leads to unsafe conditions; it limits sex workers’ ability to create safety networks, work together, screen clients, and seek necessary services.

Between 1980 and 2009, indoor prostitution was legal in Rhode Island. During that time period, there was a significant decline in sexually transmitted diseases and sexual assaults within the state. Rhode Island legislators should return to policies that had demonstrable positive effects on public health and safety in the state.

Leading organizations, including the World Health Organization, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, have endorsed decriminalization as the best way to combat trafficking, reduce harm, improve health outcomes, and uphold human rights. Criminalizing sex work has

consistently failed to protect people, instead it only increases stigma, pushes workers into unsafe conditions, and limits their ability to report violence or seek help. Decriminalization, by contrast, allows sex workers to access basic protections, healthcare, and legal rights, creating safer communities for everyone.

This legislature has already passed several of the policies recommended by the study commission, and should continue to heed the advice of experts and community members. It is critical that you pass H8057 to decriminalize commercial sexual activity in Rhode Island. This policy change will address systemic inequality and create more equitable and safe communities for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.

Equality New York