



April 8, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee
Chair, House Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Written Testimony to Oppose 2026 – H8057

Chair McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Michelle Loranger, and I submit this written testimony as the Executive Director of Day One in strong opposition to H8057, An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses – Commercial Sexual Activity.

Day One proudly serves as Rhode Island’s Sexual Assault Coalition and the Rhode Island Children’s Network, the state chapter of Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs). For more than 53 years, we have provided direct services to survivors of sexual violence and human trafficking of all ages. Through this work, we witness firsthand the devastating harm caused by sexual exploitation and the lasting damage it leaves on survivors’ self-worth, safety, and stability.

H8057 raises serious concerns for survivor protection, public safety, and the prevention of trafficking. Commercial sexual exploitation is driven by demand. Any policy that reduces accountability for those who sustain that demand risks increasing harm to people who are already disproportionately affected by poverty, coercion, substance use, racism, and gender-based violence.

There is no independent evidence showing that decriminalizing or normalizing the sex trade makes it safer. In fact, research including a large-scale academic study of 150 countries led by the London School of Economics, found that where sex work is legalized, sex trafficking increases. By contrast, evidence consistently shows that buyer accountability and education programs reduce recidivism and exploitation without criminalizing victims.

Although H8057 includes provisions related to trafficking as a racketeering offense, these do not offset the broader harms of decriminalizing the commercial sex market. Decriminalization can make exploitation harder to detect, weaken law-enforcement intervention, and blur the line between consent and coercion—particularly in situations involving trafficking, economic desperation, or third-party control.

The bill's provision allowing expungement of commercial sexual activity convictions after just one year further weakens buyer accountability and removes critical tools used to identify patterns of exploitation and intervene early.

Rhode Island already knows the consequences of decriminalization. From 1980 to 2009, indoor prostitution was effectively legal in our state, a period marked by increased violence, trafficking, and organized crime—leading this legislature to reverse course.

Rhode Island must consider and explore better options. We need to invest in trauma-informed services and housing, strengthen diversion, increase accessibility of pathways for those sold or trafficked, and expand proven demand-reduction strategies that hold buyers accountable. We need to do more for “survival sex workers”, legalization is NOT the answer.

Commercial sexual exploitation is not victimless. It is inseparable from violence, coercion, and long-term trauma. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose H8057 and instead advance policies that prioritize survivor safety, buyer accountability, and most importantly, the prevention of exploitation.

Thank you for your time, your commitment to survivors, and your leadership on these critical issues.

Sincerely,



Michelle Loranger, MPA
Executive Director