

Stop Human Trafficking: Oppose Decriminalization of Prostitution in Rhode Island

To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly:

We, the undersigned citizens of Rhode Island, respectfully urge you to oppose any effort to decriminalize prostitution in our state.

Prostitution and sex trafficking are inextricably linked. Decriminalization will expand the commercial sex market by inviting more sex buyers into the market—not just from Rhode Island but via sex tourism. This will only fuel sexual exploitation and make Rhode Island a dangerous place to live. How do we know?

Because our state tried this experiment before. When Rhode Island decriminalized indoor prostitution between 1980–2009, violence, organized crime, and child sexual exploitation surged. It was so detrimental that you, our legislators, reversed the decision in 2009 and adopted more laws to protect victims. Survivors described being moved through brothels, casinos, and along the I-95 corridor by traffickers and pimps who operated freely. Providence’s Mayor called the state a true “Wild West” while trafficking experts labeled our state a “zone of impunity” for sex traffickers.

Full decriminalization does not end violence or exploitation—it invites more harm and chaos from those who would harm and exploit our most vulnerable. Evidence from countries that have decriminalized prostitution demonstrate that abuse, coercion, and exploitation thrive.

Instead, Rhode Island should prioritize:

- Holding buyers and traffickers accountable
- Strengthening enforcement against exploiters
- Investing in survivor services

Let’s not go backwards and repeat a failed experiment. **Instead, let’s stand with survivors to demand safety and accountability for all Rhode Islanders!**

Support SB 2145/ HB 7201 – Legislation that hold sex buyers accountable for fueling the demand that causes sex trafficking, imposing a fine on them that finances survivor services, and requiring them to attend a mandatory buyer accountability program where they receive education on the long term physical and psychological harms of prostitution on victims.

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