

Call Off Your Old
Tired Ethics



May 10th, 2021

In Opposition to H5270

House Corporations Committee

My name is Bella Robinson of West Warwick, RI. I have earned my living as a sex worker for the past 35 years, long before [RI criminalized sex work in 2009](#) . For the past 10 years, I have been the executive director of “Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics” (COYOTE RI) As you can see from my attached resume, I am an expert on sex trafficking.

We have no doubt the sponsors of this bill have good intentions, however, this bill clearly shows that they don't know much about the topic. Even though we submitted written testimony for the hearing on H5270, none of the sponsors of this bill contacted us to learn more about the topic.

In March 2021, we all saw the media reports regarding the Asian spa workers in Georgia who were murdered because of whoreaphobia, the hatred of sex workers and Asian Hate. Our community and legislators need to take some responsibility for creating stigma against sex workers, which is a form of promoting violence against marginalized women, who refuse to conform. ([Saying Never Again to the Violence in Atlanta Means Saying No to More Policing](#))

The US government has been funding the [misinformation campaign on trafficking for over a decade](#) , in their attempt to conflate consensual adult sex work with trafficking. Funded at over [677 million in 2015](#) , to “create awareness about trafficking” and “host public trainings on how to spot trafficking” asking people to become vigilantes and snitch on sex workers to get them arrested so they can lie to the media about how the women were rescued and about all the wonderful services that the arrested women were offered. More often than not the only service offered is a bed in a public shelter or a trafficking shelter where sex workers are disrespected, pressured to exit the industry, while they receive no help paying for rent, childcare, or putting food on the table for the entire family. In fact, it creates barriers to lock “people involved in the sex industry” out of public service and allows nonprofits to discriminate against them. There was no COVID relief for RI sex workers, so COYOTE provided RI sex workers & dancers with over 67k in direct aid because we knew the state and the federal government was not going to provide for this marginalized population. COYOTE RI has been tracking this funding, and as we can see from the [non profits 990's](#) that the majority of this funding goes to pay for salaries and offices and hardly any of the funding trickles down to provide any service to “people involved in the sex industry”. This may be the biggest scam that has squandered our tax dollars.

Over and over again we see sensational headlines that cherry-pick a few cases of horrible abuse to try to convince society that this is the norm. Let's discuss the [Robert Kraft spa case in FL](#). Homeland told the media that it was an international sex trafficking ring from China and that the women were sex slaves, as it turns out they were all consenting adult sex workers, and they were arrested and put in cages. One of the women has been detained by ICE and will be deported and the other 2 women were charged with several felonies and ordered to pay over 30,000 in fines. This is what rescued looks like. Another example [The Biggest Sex-Trafficking Bust in FBI History Was Totally Bogus](#). We could provide you dozens and dozens of headlines where government officials lied about trafficking.

COYOTE RI has conducted more research on sex trafficking and sex work than any other institute or organization in the US, and we did this by surveying "people involved in the sex industry" Our data has been archived at Brown University, [Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women- Coyote RI Survey Collection](#). It's important that we make policy decisions based on evidence-based research, and while we have watched the anti-sex work lobby publish fake stats that are repeated in the media thousands of times because the federal government is funding these organizations to do this. Let's ask ourselves if sex trafficking is on the rise in RI, [why are the prostitution arrests at an all-time low in RI?](#) In 2019 the [FBI reported only 12](#) confirmed cases domestic sex trafficking cases involving a minor for the entire country. We encourage the end to the government-funded misinformation campaigns against "people involved in the sex industry" so we can start creating harm reduction policies based on evidence-based research.

We also think that forcing hotels into the misguided government-funded narrative is unconstitutional, just as the [anti-prostitution pledge was struck down as unconstitutional](#) as it violates their first amendment rights. Meanwhile, Congress ignored recommendations by the World Health Organization and Lancet that have said for years that by decriminalizing prostitution we could reduce new HIV infections by 41% in just one year. We also tend to question why there is no campaign to mandate that Churches put up notices to be on the lookout for Priests who rape children, and why are we not concerned about RI's broken DCYF system where children die in state care?

All the research shows that criminalization actually increased violence and exploitation because victims can't come forward to report abuse without risking arrest. In our 2015 RI sex worker survey, we had 63 participants and 24% of them reported having been robbed, raped, or assaulted by the police. This led us to ask Senate Sam Bell to introduce [S0249](#) which would have made it a 3-year felony for peace officers to engage in sex with people detained or in custody. Senator Tiara Mack introduced [S0771](#) which decriminalizes prostitution by reducing it to a civil fine.

Representative Anastasia P Williams introduced [H5250](#)-House Resolution Creating A Special Legislative Commission To Study Ensuring Racial Equity And Optimizing Health And Safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals (creates a 13 Member Special Legislative Commission To Study Health/safety Impact Of Optimizing Health/safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals With Report Date Of 5/31/22, Expiring On 6/30/22.) It would create a 13 member commission to study how laws affect people in the sex industry. (Status: (Introduced) 1-29-2021 - Introduced, referred to House Health & Human Services. We invite all legislators who need to be educated on this topic to join our efforts because repeating the same fake stats and false facts on sex trafficking, isn't much different than QAnon and Pizza Gate conspiracies. What that it does is harm sex trafficking victims and sex workers, by promoting stigma and violence against them.

On Thursday May 6th 2021, Providence City Council passed a resolution in support of H5250-

Sex workers are against sex trafficking and they could be the best tool we have to identify victims if law enforcement would stop refusing to cooperate with us. THERE ARE NO BAD WOMEN, JUST BAD LAWS

“People involved in the sex industry” are part of our community and we don't want to see our community members arrested, given criminal records, isolated from their communities & continue to be discriminated against when trying to access public services. We think the health and safety of “people involved in the sex industry” should be a priority for RI legislators. Everyone should have the right to report violence, abuse, and exploitation and to be able to gain access to the justice system. Policing the bodies of marginalized women shouldn't be a priority for law enforcement. Our police resources should be spent investigating violent crimes.

Sincerely,
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