

Call Off Your Old
Tired Ethics



SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF COYOTE RI

February 7th, 2022

My name is [Bella Robinson](#). I have been a sex worker for 35 years. I founded COYOTE RI in 2010. Since then I have served as the executive director. COYOTE RI is an organization of sex workers, former sex workers and sex trafficking victims, who advocate for policies that promote the health and safety of sex workers. We conduct participatory research, run focus groups and engage in policy work. We also provide direct services to sex workers and trafficking victims, and we support incarcerated sex workers.

I am writing to you today in opposition of SB3347. The bill is offensive that it excludes sex worker rights organizations and seems to think that the Dept of Human Services are qualified to determine who are “qualified persons who are verified victims of sex trafficking” and “who are female or sexual and gender minority individuals seeking to exit the sex trade”.

Its also offensive that they excluding men, transgender men and non binary people from support. This bill provides no guidelines or details, and we doubt any that sex workers seeking to exit the sex industry are going to be provided 2,000 a month for up to a year without all kinds of rules, requirements and barriers. Dept of Human Services has no way to verify who “people involved in the sex industry” are. I also notice the phrase “for up to a year” so basically they can require someone to jump through hoops and barriers and only end up providing one month in basic income. Our participatory research shows that shamed based counseling is as psychologically damaging as conversion therapy is for LGBT people.

SB3347 is kind of like asking rape victims to go get services from their rapists. “People in the sex industry” have good reason not to trust government institutes who have promoted stigma and violence against them for years and who are part of trafficking tasks forces, who engage with law enforcement to conduct raids and rescues that traumatizes them. Rarely do they find victims. All the evidence based research shows that criminalization fuels violence and exploitation, because the people being exploited can not report it, without risking being arrested. The colladeral damage is sex workers being arrested, harassed and abused by law enforcement, put in cages, ordered to pay fines. It is also very dangerous for sex workers with children to engage with Dept of

Human Services as they often report them to child services. Sex workers know that they will take their children away without any evidence that they are bad parents.

Since sex worker led organizations actually know who the local sex workers are, wouldnt it make sense to fund them to provide services to their own members?

For instance COYOTE RI provided RI sex workers with over 75k (2020-2021) in rent assistance, grocery gift cards, cleaning supplies. Now we are getting ready to provide them COVID rapid home tests, N95 masks and more grocery card gift cards and help paying their phone bills.

COYOTE RI has conducted numerous research projects, surveying US sex workers. We have conducted focus groups, we have analyzed tens of thousands of pages of charging documents by accessing FOIA requests. (Below we have provided the links to our archived data.)

1. Pembroke – Sex Work in the US After FOSTA (April 2018-19) Survey Quantitative Data [\[link\]](#)
2. Pembroke- Trafficking and the Sex Industry in the United States Survey 2017 [\[link\]](#)
3. Trafficking and the Sex Industry in Rhode Island Survey- 2014-2016 [\[link\]](#)
4. Youth report - Policing Modern Day Slavery & Carceral Care in Rhode Island. [\[link\]](#)

Our research shows that shamed based counseling is as psychologically damaging as conversation therapy is to LBGT folks. Its problematic that anti trafficking organizations seek to pit sex workers against sex trafficking victims.

In fact Polaris Project the largest trafficking hotline in the US,, refers “people involved in the sex industry” to SWOP Behind Bars, because they have no direct services, even though they are funded at over 7 million a year. Even though Sex worker rights led organizations are underserved and underfunded, we do the best we can to provide services to “people involved in the sex industry” who are in crisis and we direct them to the limited services available for those who want to exit. However that doesn’t solve folks “POVERTY ISSUES”. Most states have housing lists that are years long. Affordable housing is an issue in every state. Dept of Health and Human Services already has millions, for instance SNAP funds do not feed people

for a full month. Job training doesn't get folks a job that pays a living wage. "People involved in the sex industry" are engaged in sex work because its their best option to escape poverty and provide for their families. Public services should be for all poor people, not just "people involved in the sex industry.

It makes more sense for the Dept of Human Services to advocate for affordable housing, medicare for all, increase in minimum wage, and more opportunities for poor people. If any funding is allotted for "people involved in the sex industry" who want to exit, those funds should go to local sex worker rights led organizations. The anti trafficking organizations are already funded at over 600 million a year in federal TIPS funding. [\[link\]](#)

We ask you to vote NO on SB 3347 and suggest that the Dept of Human Services engage with their local sex worker rights led organizations to better understand this populations needs and how to distrube resources to "people involved in the sex industry.

Sincerely,

Bella Robinson (COYOTE RI)

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