



May 15, 2023

Dear Massachusetts Legislators,

We are voting to urge you to vote yes on S.1046 / H.1758, S.945 / H.1683, H.1757, and S.913 / H.1640.

COYOTE RI is a group of current and former Rhode Island sex workers, sex trafficking survivors, and allies working for improved policy for people in the sex industry. We provide mutual aid, participate in and do our own research, and work to change bad laws that negatively impact the health and safety of our community.

We are especially excited to see S.1046 / H.1758, which would create a Human Trafficking Prevention and Sex Worker Project and establish immunity in reporting crimes, among other important elements.

Immunity in reporting crimes is urgently needed by sex workers and sex trafficking survivors. In a survey performed by COYOTE and Brown University, made possible by a grant from the American Sociological Association, 47% of Rhode Island sex workers and sex trafficking survivors reported being a victim or witness of a serious crime they hadn't reported. That leaves a lot of predators free to target Rhode Island's most vulnerable citizens.

When they did try to report crimes, 79% of Rhode Island sex workers said they were turned away without having their report taken. Even worse, 27% of Rhode Island sex workers were arrested or threatened with arrest while trying to report a violent crime. While many police departments have changed their policies around sex workers, that hasn't changed the trauma that sex workers and sex trafficking survivors already have with police.

In a 2022 survey, 77% of sex workers said that they would report violent crimes to police if there were an immunity law in place to protect them.

Many states have passed laws requiring businesses in industries with high rates of trafficking - restaurants, hospitality, carnivals, etc - to display awareness signs asking customers to report potential labor trafficking to police. Logically, we know that customers are the people most likely to encounter trafficking victims. There needs to be a clear path for them to come forward and make these reports.

Without immunity in reporting, customers and other sex workers are left to attempt to “rescue” victims on their own, potentially creating more dangerous situations.

When sex workers and sex trafficking survivors don’t have access to the equal protections of the justice system because their sex is criminalized, everyone is less safe. Serial killers like Gary Ridgeway, Robert Hansen, Joel Rifkin, the Long Island Killer, Samuel Little, and federal Border Patrol Officer Juan David Ortiz have gotten away with killing sex workers and sex trafficking survivors for years before targeting other marginalized women. It's time for policy makers to take a strong leadership role in guaranteeing sex workers and sex trafficking survivors equal access to the protections of the justice system.

Please take the time to read some of the stories that have been shared by sex workers and sex trafficking survivors about their experiences of being victimized and either reporting it or not: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mHGSD-naxSIC4UjanFE5lm6_8zCwSfqzK9xTBduf5Qw/e/dit?usp=sharing

The Human Trafficking Prevention and Sex Worker Project is an essential step to eliminating sex trafficking in our communities. Sex workers have the most knowledge and experience with sex trafficking, but because of criminalization we are often prevented from sharing this experience in meaningful ways that lead to effective policy changes.

Please vote yes on S.1046 / H.1758, S.945 / H.1683, H.1757, and S.913 / H.1640, and don’t hesitate to email us (bella@coyoteri.org) if there is any more data or information we can provide.

Thank you,

Bella Robinson
Tara Burns
Kayla Katt
Ramona Flour

COYOTE RI

Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, Rhode Island (COYOTE RI) is a group of current and former sex workers and sex trafficking survivors working on policy for improved health and safety for people in Rhode Island’s sex industry. Learn more at www.coyoteri.org