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Sex Workers Celebrate the Conviction of Jose Torres aka “Joey the Player”

Jose Torres terrorized the sex worker community for over a decade. He knew that most sex workers would not report being raped and tortured because they are criminalized. The few sex workers who did report him, some from the hospital, said police didn't take them seriously or follow up on their reports. The sex worker community made hundreds of posts online and on “dangerous client/blacklist” websites warning other sex workers about Joey the Player. However after FOSTA (the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act) was passed in 2018, these lists were shut down, allowing Torres unfettered access to potential victims.

By 2020, underground community forums reported that Joey the Player was again regularly holding sex workers hostage and torturing them. Blair Hopkins, Executive Director of SWOP Behind Bars (SBB) highlighted the story in episode 20 of SBB's podcast [“All In A Day's \(Sex\) Work”](#). SBB was instrumental in getting the FBI to investigate, connecting some of Torres' victims with an attorney, advocating for other victims to contact the FBI anonymously, and providing additional vital support to the victims.

“If you are a sex worker who's experienced violence, or who is in need of other kinds of assistance, please reach out to your peers and allies at the Sex Worker Community Support Line by calling 1-877-776-2004, or chat with us anonymously at <https://swopbehindbars.org>,” urged Hopkins.

“The federal government should have a blanket immunity provision for people to report these crimes without the threat of being investigated for sex trafficking,” said Maxine Doogan, President of the Erotic Service Providers' Legal Education and Research

Project, referring to the long-standing federal practice of charging sex workers and sex trafficking survivors with sex trafficking or conspiracy to commit sex trafficking in the same cases wherein they have been victimized.

Torres was charged federally under Section 2422(a) of Title 18, which prohibits anyone from "knowingly persuading, inducing, enticing or coercing an individual to travel in interstate or foreign commerce with the purpose of engaging in prostitution or any criminal sexual activity, or attempting to do so, and imposes a maximum punishment of 10 years' imprisonment and/or a fine under Title 18." The law has more typically been used against sex workers and their drivers or security workers who travel together for safety because of predators like Joey the Player.

"We are so happy to see these laws and police agencies that are typically used against us used against someone who was harming us," said Bella Robinson, Executive Director of COYOTE RI. "We are so thankful to SWOP Behind Bars and the investigators who finally decided to take this seriously. Today our communities are safer because these convictions have been secured. We urge US Attorneys Spiro and Barnes to seek the maximum sentence of 80 years."

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