

Elisabeth Townsend
31 Providence Ave
Riverside, RI 02915

POSITION: Oppose RI HB 7165 (Criminal Activity - Commercial Sexual Activity)

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Elisabeth Townsend, I am a resident of East Providence, RI and am a part of an organization called Together with Love that works with the community to advocate and care for those impacted by Sexual Exploitation.

My opposition for HB 7167 correlates to the statement and reasoning I provided in my letter towards opposing HB 7035. I believe that immunity should be extended to victims and those being prostituted, however, I do not agree with immunity being provided to those who are engaging in illegal activity, including the buying of sex.

This bill seems to include that a person engaging in illegal activity, such as purchasing sex, who witnesses any crime, can use this provision to avoid arrest or prosecution, provided that the crime occurred around the same time and/or was related to that activity.

While this language provides greater specific requirements of reporting a crime to benefit from immunity, it still indirectly allows those who are exploiting others to continue their behavior.

You may have heard the expression "where there is a will, there is a way." Any opportunity that is given within these bills that permits exploiters to sneak around vague language filled with loopholes for their own personal gain, will be taken. This is what we are seeing in response to the suggestions made in the report conducted by the Rhode Island study commission; bills that are introducing these recommendations intended to help marginalized groups of people, when in reality, will do the opposite.

Marginalized groups of people within our state should absolutely be protected, however, to do this we need stricter laws that hold buyers and exploiters accountable and greater and more comprehensive supports for those implicated in prostitution, wanting to exit the sex trade. Additionally, we must draw our attention to the root matter of what leads people into a life of prostitution and its direct ties to trafficking and exploitation.

Thank you for your time,

Elisabeth Townsend