

February 15, 2024

RE: Support for H7165 - “Relating to Criminal Offenses - Commercial Sexual Activity”

To the House Judiciary Committee,

We would like to express my strong support of H7165, granting immunity from prosecution for prostitution to victims and witnesses of crime who report that crime to law enforcement, aid in the investigation of that crime, and/or seek healthcare services in relation to the crime. Sex work in general should be decriminalized. Criminalizing consensual sex work harms people and perpetuates cycles of poverty.

Immunity protections create an important tool for law enforcement in their efforts to identify and prosecute perpetrators of violence and trafficking. People involved in the sex trade (whether by choice, circumstance, or by force, fraud, or coercion) are especially vulnerable to violence and exploitation, but frequently don't report crimes perpetrated against them due to fear of arrest. When those abusers aren't discovered by law enforcement, they are able to continue violence and exploitation with impunity. Thus, immunity policies serve a dual purpose: they allow victims and witnesses of crime to safely seek the services they need without fear of

arrest, and they also provide invaluable tools for law enforcement investigating crimes including human trafficking, assault, and even murder.

Rhode Island has the opportunity to join other states throughout the country creating similar policies.

Alaska, Washington, California, Oregon, Utah, New Hampshire, Vermont, Montana, and Colorado have existing immunity laws, and other state legislatures are considering similar bills this year: New York, Hawaii, and Massachusetts. H7165 is a particularly comprehensive immunity bill and would be among the strongest in the country because it also ensures that people reporting crime will still receive immunity even if they withdraw their participation in an investigation. It grants immunity for reporting any crime so long as it occurred at or around the time, or was related to, the commercial sexual activity that cannot be prosecuted. Rhode Island's "Special Legislative Study Commission Ensuring Racial Equity and Optimizing

Health and Safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals" issued a report in 2023 recommending the consideration of this legislation.

Individuals and organizations with a breadth of priorities and experiences have openly supported these policies across the country, including

trafficking survivors, advocates, sex workers, prosecutors, and police departments. To make communities safer, it is in the public interest to encourage victims and witnesses of crime to come forward, aid law enforcement, and receive needed medical care. H7165 enables law enforcement to arrest and convict those committing criminal acts, and in so doing, protect Rhode Island's most vulnerable. It sends a clear message that trafficking survivors and sex workers deserve the right to report crimes committed against them or others and to seek justice if they so choose. I urge you to pass this legislation as a critical step towards addressing trafficking and violent crime in Rhode Island, and to promote the health, wellbeing, and social support of all citizens.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Jae Sun