

Elisabeth Townsend
31 Providence Ave
Riverside, RI 02915

POSITION: Oppose RI HB 7307 (Criminal Offenses - 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. We are dedicated to working with the community to advocate and care for those impacted by Sexual Exploitation.

I understand that this bill amends immunity provisions for those involved in commercial sexual activity. While I am strongly in favor of protecting victims and those who are involved in prostitution, this bill provides language that can be possibly interpreted as protecting those who are witnessing a crime while engaging in an illegal activity themselves, such as buying sex.

The language in this bill regarding the wording of criminal offenses is vague and immunity needs to be clarified so that it does not apply to the wide spectrum of crimes listed.

The stipulations in this bill serve as another avenue for buyers to get away with purchasing sex and exploiting individuals. Why are we continuing to find ways to protect those who are inflicting violence and extreme harm onto others?

According to Sage Journals Homicidal Studies from the University of Minnesota and National Institutes of Health, women involved in street prostitution are "60-100 times more likely to be murdered than their counterparts not involved in prostitution." Additionally it reports that "45-75%" of sex workers globally have a chance of experiencing sexual violence on the job.

Members of the House Judiciary Committee, I am strongly urging you to really take a look at the dark underside of prostitution and exploitation that is happening in every town, district and neighborhood within our state prior to voting on bills that will give buyers a free pass rather than holding them accountable.

The more bills we accept with ambiguous language that protect buyers and people who are exploiting others, the greater destruction and havoc this will inflict not only on prostituted people, but in our communities at large.

Thank you for your consideration,

Elisabeth Townsend

“Protecting Sex Workers: Why Are They Vulnerable to Violence?” NewsNation,
28 July 2023, www.newsnationnow.com/crime/protecting-sex-workers-vulnerable-violence/.
Accessed 15 Feb. 2024.