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POSITION: Oppose RI HB 7452

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Connie Mason and I live in Barrington. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you. I am part of a local non-profit organization called Together with Love that advocates for sexually exploited people.

We agree with the ways in which HB 7452 provides relief and support for prostituted women by repealing the crime of loitering and other penalties for prostitution or other commercial sexual activity.

However, due to the bundled nature of the RI prostitution statute (meaning that it criminalizes the sex buyer and the prostituted person in the same section), this proposed bill will also repeal the crime of loitering for the buyers. We oppose sex buyers being covered by this bill for 2 reasons:

One, it is unjust and unfair for buyers, who are predominately white, middle- to upper-class men*, to enjoy the protection of a bill that is clearly and appropriately focused on the needs of the prostituted women.

Two, studies show that buyers of sex are often violent and abusive. In one study, 44% of sex-workers reported having experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime. 68% of respondents had been raped since entering prostitution.** Buyers of sex are often engaging in criminal behavior against prostituted persons and should not be protected legally by this bill.

Additionally, the unintended consequences for victims of sex trafficking will create even more suffering. If law enforcement cannot legally inquire about the welfare of prostitutes, they won't be able to identify and help sex trafficking victims.

A similar bill (SB 357) was passed in CA in July 2022. As a result, officials say CA sex trafficking operations are 'out of control,' calling for a repeal of the new loitering law. San Diego's DA, Summer Stephan, says pimps joke California loitering law makes conditions "easy" for trafficking.***

We hope that you will recommend that HB 7452 be changed to exclude buyers from benefitting. And that you will thoughtfully consider the negative ramifications for sex trafficking victims.

Thank you.

*active high-frequency buyers are much more likely than other men to make \$100,000 or more annually

(<https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf>)

** (Prostitution, violence, and posttraumatic stress disorder, M Farley , H Barkan, 1998)

*** (<https://abc7news.com/ca-loitering-law-sex-trafficking-sb-357-workers/12910562/>), (<https://timesofsandiego.com/crime/2023/04/10/a-new-california-law-decriminalizing-loitering-has-led-to-more-prostitution/#:~:text=It%20just%20repealed%20misdemeanor%20loitering%20laws%20targeting%20prostitution%2C,someone%20of%20being%20exploited%20or%20being%20under%20age>)