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POSITION: Oppose RI HB 7452 (Corrections and Loitering Bill)

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee.

My name is Robin Levasseur from Johnston. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.

I am a survivor of commercial sex trafficking. I was trafficked in RI—in Providence, a few blocks from here—and other states for 20+ years. I got free when my trafficker finally died.

For the last 10 years to the present, I do street outreach in Providence, developing relationships with prostituting people and sex trafficking victims. I assist several organizations by distributing resources, food, and essential items for survival.

The situation is bad out there. Addiction and prostitution are entwined. Trading drugs for sex is a major practice that traps women in the Life. People fleeing domestic violence, or kids who get kicked out, can easily end up on the street. And pimps and traffickers are fast to pick vulnerable people.

This is not a world where we want to eliminate law enforcement from.

I oppose HB 7452 because the reality it describes is a fantasy. Same with the other two bills you are considering, the immunity bills, all portray the commercial sex market as a place that should just be let alone.

Well, I don't think women should be arrested for the abuse they suffer but the buyers and traffickers should not be left alone to commit rape and violence as they do every day—day after day.

Despite some good language in HB 7452 about more programs for women in prison—that's good—what women in prostitution mainly need is **services to get out!**

There are some good cops out there who try to help trafficking victims. Recently, we were doing outreach to women on the streets and it was cops who showed us where prostituting people were sleeping—in the cemetery! The cops wanted to get them some help. They weren't harassing them, they were concerned for them.

Few sex trafficking victims self-identify. Many are being coerced by a pimp or manager or boyfriend. They are groomed and talked into believing that they are turning tricks by choice, but really, they have no choice, don't keep the money they make, and live in fear of their trafficker. That's what happened to me.

In this kind of situation, closely associated with crime, how do cops identify trafficking victims? They must work with sex trade survivors so we can help connect people in prostitution with services.

I have to oppose HB 7452 because it is a step backward toward legalization, which I promise you, is a violent, ugly, miserable world.

Thank you for listening.