



END HUMAN TRAFFICKING.
PROMOTE HEALTH & SAFETY.

www.DecriminalizeSex.Work

March 18, 2025

RE: Support for S810 - "An act relating to criminal offenses - Commercial sexual activity"

To the Senate Judiciary Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support of S810, which would decriminalize commercial sexual activity. Decriminalize Sex Work is a national organization pursuing a state-by-state strategy to advance legislation protecting the rights, health, and safety of adult consensual sex workers and victims of human trafficking in the United States. We are a group of experts, activists, and advocates, with decades of combined experience in policy, direct services, lived experience, and community engagement. We urge you to consider the expert testimony you will hear today, all which will indicate that decriminalizing commercial sexual activity is the safest and most effective policy model of prostitution laws.

Extensive research and evidence shows that decriminalizing sex work will help end human trafficking, improve public health, and promote community safety. In 2023, the "Special Legislative Study Commission Ensuring Racial Equity and Optimizing Health and Safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals" (created by House Resolution 5280 in 2021) released its final report, after two years of meeting with a variety of experts and stakeholders. The Commission specifically recommended that legislators ensure that "private, consensual sexual activity remains out of the reach of criminal laws". The Commission found that the criminalization of sex work "fuels stigma and discrimination against sex workers, which impedes their access to basic necessities, including healthcare, housing, and other social services." Decriminalizing sex work would allow workers more access to critical services without the harms of criminalization.

This bill would repeal all commercial sexual activity laws while leaving laws against human trafficking on the books. This will bolster anti-trafficking efforts around the state. Prostitution laws make it difficult for victims and witnesses to report exploitation without risking prosecution. They also direct law enforcement resources towards consenting adults, limiting their ability to focus on human trafficking. Additionally, when commercial sexual activity is illegal, it continues to happen - but that criminalization leads to unsafe conditions.

This is a critical moment to address the harm caused by the criminalization of sex work. S810 will create immediate meaningful change for affected communities by addressing a major contributor to mass incarceration, giving sex workers the freedom to support themselves and their families without fear of violence or exploitation, and fostering an environment that allows victims of trafficking to seek safety without risk of arrest. It also has precedent: between 1980 and 2009, indoor prostitution was legal in Rhode Island. During that time period, there was a

significant decline in sexually transmitted diseases and sexual assaults within the state: specifically, reported rape offenses fell by 30% and female gonorrhea incidence declined by over 40%.¹

Numerous respected public health and safety authorities globally agree that the decriminalization of sex work is the ideal policy to keep sex work safe, and to significantly decrease human trafficking rates, including Amnesty International, the ACLU, and UNAIDS. This past September, the United Nations “Working Group on discrimination against women and girls” issued a mandate that concluded with this powerful endorsement of decriminalization:

The Working Group considers that there is now sufficient evidence on the harms of any forms of criminalization of sex work, including criminalization of clients and ‘third parties’ related activities. It notes the growing consensus by international human rights and other international bodies on full decriminalization of adult voluntary sex work, as well as the advocacy of sex workers rights movements for this approach. Whilst not finding it necessary to define sex work and noting the different experiences of diverse women and persons, it proposes full decriminalization of adult voluntary sex work from a human rights perspective, as it holds the greatest promise to address systemic discrimination and violence and the impunity for the violations of sex workers’ rights. It also constitutes the approach best suited to enhancing their rights to health and other socio-economic rights, freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, right to private life, and freedom from discrimination. Further, a decriminalized framework is most conducive to the protection of their rights to participate in public and political life.²

Senate Bill 810 will address systemic inequality and create more equitable and safe communities for all. Thank you very much for your consideration.

¹ Scott Cunningham, Manisha Shah, Decriminalizing Indoor Prostitution: Implications for Sexual Violence and Public Health, *The Review of Economic Studies*, Volume 85, Issue 3, July 2018, Pages 1683–1715, <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdx065>

² Mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls - “Eliminating discrimination against sex workers and securing their human rights”, page 11. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/wg/sex-work-pp-fin-proofread-24-sept.pdf>