



OUR VOICES MATTER

A Letter from Survivors

We have experienced years of abuse, violence, objectification, and dehumanization in the sex trade. We know first-hand the devastating harm and long-term trauma that happens as a result of being exploited in an industry predicated on racial, gender, and income inequality. We are aware of the recent efforts to decriminalize the sex trade and we are extremely shocked, rather outraged, by our state's suggestive openness to decriminalizing the sex trade in its entirety. We urge New York state politicians, lawmakers, and our fellow New Yorkers to learn from survivors the truth about the pervasive harms and suffering perpetrated by sex buyers, pimps, traffickers, and other exploiters and profiteers.

The multi-billion-dollar sex trade doesn't look like how the movies portray it. The majority of us are not wined and dined or treated like people. We're treated like animals. Our exploiters beat us, manipulate our minds, and control our every move. They'll do anything to satisfy their monetary or sexual needs. Our bodies are just commodified vessels used to achieve it. We know all too well that marginalized groups are at higher risk for exploitation and therefore are especially vulnerable to the harms of the sex trade. But decriminalizing the sex trade in its entirety would have disastrous consequences. Do not be confused — full decriminalization means allowing pimps, sex buyers, and brothel-owners to operate with impunity. Sex trafficking (including that of children) and organized crime increases when pimping and sex buying are decriminalized.

At a time when we are culturally taking a stand against violence and harassment towards women and marginalized groups, creating spaces of inclusion and opportunity, why would we take a step backward by allowing these very groups to be further exposed to the harms of prostitution as long as it is monetized?

As survivors, we recognize that this proposed legislation to fully decriminalize the sex trade will only cause more harm to us, and create an even greater threat to potential victims in the future. Not to mention the huge economic impact that fully decriminalizing the sex trade will have on society. Additionally, we must recognize that there are not many alternatives for survivors once they exit the sex trade. We lack the necessary resources we need to maintain sustainable lives. Housing, education, healthcare, mental health treatment, and gainful employment, are just five of the main resources that are not readily available to survivors once they've exited, leading to the increased risk of being re-exploited. We need support. We need resources. And we need to not be criminalized.

This is why we support the Equality Model. Formerly, known as the Swedish or Nordic Model, the Equality Model is the only one of its kind. Unlike full decriminalization or full legalization, this model ensures that all people in prostitution are not criminalized while simultaneously keeping the penalties for pimps, traffickers, and sex buyers, who ultimately perpetuate and fuel this enterprise. The Equality Model calls for comprehensive, trauma-informed specialized services for all people currently in prostitution. Furthermore, the Equality Model also focuses on aftercare for exited survivors-- incorporating the very same aforementioned resources that survivors need to live sustainable lives after living through such unimaginable abuse. Survivors need to know that they can trust their state with the safety of their lives. Supporting the Equality Model is a way to do just that.

To be clear, we believe in decriminalizing people in prostitution as we care deeply about their safety and well-being, however, we do not support decriminalizing our exploiters. Listening to our voices and lived experiences is essential when creating legislation around this issue. We are eager to share our perspectives and have a productive dialogue with anyone who proposes and enforces legislation as well as anyone in our local communities. However, we will not be spoken for or have our voices hijacked by anyone claiming that trafficking and prostitution survivors support the full decriminalization of pimps, buyers, and brothel owners. We will no longer stand by while our truths are misunderstood or misrepresented to support the misguided aims of the pro-prostitution “de facto” progressive political agenda.

The vast majority of survivors of prostitution and trafficking want to put an end to the buying and selling of vulnerable people and know firsthand that the best way to do so is to ensure that pimping and sex buying remain behaviors that aren't encouraged or tolerated. Will you listen to us, New York?

Respectfully,

Survivor Leaders of New Yorkers for the Equality Model