

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE CAPITOL
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612
(785) 296-7300
aaron.coleman@house.ks.gov



1316 S. 52ND STREET
KANSAS CITY, KANSAS 66106

AARON COLEMAN
37TH DISTRICT

February 24, 2021

Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

Representative Russell Jennings, Chairman

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

If you want to protect women and sex workers of other genders, you should legalize sex work. By pushing this respectable hard-working profession onto the black market you cut workers off from justice. When you make something illegal disputes will be resolved in the streets through violence and threats without any protection from police or the courts. On the other hand, by legalizing it disputes can be resolved by a court of law. By criminalizing sex work you are, in effect, telling sex workers that if they are facing harassment or payment disputes that they should not be able to petition a Judge to issue a remedy.

How do we know legalizing sex work is effective in protecting workers? Because it works in other countries. An article in the Harvard Civil Liberties Law Review with the headline “To Protect Women, Legalize [Sex Work]” lays out a history of the world’s oldest profession.

“[A]rguments against [sex work] center around concern for the health and safety of women, and those concerns are not unfounded. [Sex work] is an incredibly dangerous profession for the (mostly) women involved; sexual assault, forced drug addiction, physical abuse, and death are common in the industry. ... Moreover, since [sex work] is illegal in most places in the United States, there are few legal protections in place for [sex workers]; many fear that seeking help will only lead to arrest, and many who do seek help are arrested and then have to battle the stigma of a criminal record while they try to reintegrate into society.

So why is the response to such a dangerous industry to drive it further underground, away from societal resources and legal protections?” says the Harvard Civil Liberties Law Review, “[The] Netherlands, where sex work has been legal for almost twenty years. Bringing the industry out of the black market and imposing strict regulations has improved the safety of sex workers. Brothels are required to obtain and renew safety and hygiene licenses in order to operate, and street [sales] is legal and heavily regulated in places like the Red Light District. Not only does sex work become safer when it is regulated, but legalization also works to weed out the black market that exists for [sex work], thereby making women safer overall. Also, sex workers are not branded as criminals, so they have better access to the legal system and are encouraged to report behaviors that are a danger to themselves and other women in the industry. Finally, legalizing sex work will provide many other positive externalities, including tax revenue, reduction in sexually transmitted diseases, and reallocation of law enforcement resources.” The article continues: “The underlying reason that people are uncomfortable listening to sex workers about legalizing [sex work] has nothing to do with concern for the health and safety of women. If that were the genuine concern, [sex work] would be legal in the United States by now. The underlying reason people disagree with legalizing [sex work] ... is telling women what they can and cannot do with their bodies ... from a place of control.”

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

If you want to protect Sex Workers, you don't have to legalize sex work. Decriminalizing it will produce similar results. An article in the Independent with the headline "Decriminalising sex work is the only way to protect women – and New Zealand has proved that it works" tells the story of sex workers who felt that they were empowered in being able to deny certain clientele without repercussion of physical harm. The Independent says, "[M]ore than 60 percent of the 772 sex workers who participated reported feeling more able to refuse to see certain clients, and 95 percent said they felt they had rights after decriminalization." The rights being given back to them meant the balance of power shifted to sex workers and moved away from those who would seek to exploit them.

I urge the Members of the Committee to vote NO on HB2274 and stop trying to drive the sex work industry deep underground into the black market and stop endangering sex workers by making their profession the domain of criminals who seek to exploit them.

Thank you for your attention,

-Rep. Aaron Coleman, House District 37

Works Cited

Armstrong, Lynzi. "Decriminalisation Is the Only Way to Protect Sex Workers – New Zealand Has Proved It." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 29 May 2017,
www.independent.co.uk/voices/sex-workers-decriminalisation-prostitution-new-zealand-new-law-works-research-proves-sex-workers-safer-justice-a7761426.html.

Forestiere, Annamarie. "To Protect Women, Legalize Prostitution." *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, Harvard Civil Liberties Law Review, 2019,
harvardcrcl.org/to-protect-women-legalize-prostitution/.