



DECRIMINALIZE SEX WORK IN DC

MAKE DC SAFER FOR SEX WORKERS

BYP100 is an activist member-based organization of Black 18-35 year olds, dedicated to creating justice and freedom for all Black people through a Black queer feminist lens

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- According to DC Criminal Code Section 22-2701, it is unlawful to engage in or solicit prostitution and those who are found to break this law can be fined or imprisoned, provided they are over the age of 18.
- In 2015, Metro Police Department arrested 723 adults for prostitution and 6 juveniles. It should be noted this is based on the most serious charge, so if prostitution was a lesser charge, it is not included.
- The people most likely to be arrested, searched, fined and imprisoned are Black and Latino, women, girls and/or LGBTQ. These communities are already at heightened risk for incarceration, poverty, and violence. Criminalization does not assist them in escaping any of these situations. Instead, it furthers the cycles.
- Often police use condoms and profiling (i.e. race, clothing and gender expression) as proof of engaging in prostitution and arrest people based on this.

WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

- This discrimination from police subjects sex workers and citizens at large, to humiliating searches and abuse. And in the case of immigrants, there is an increased risk and fear of possible deportation or detention.
- It also increases the likelihood that sex workers, and people generally, will not carry condoms, and is at odds with the supposed HIV and STI prevention initiatives of our district.
- Criminalization decreases the likelihood that sex workers will alert police if harmed for fear of being arrested instead of protected. This diminished relationship between police and the sex work community makes it more difficult to find human traffickers, as sex workers cannot safely report what they may see to proper authorities.
- Criminalization, and subsequent arrest records or charges, makes it harder for sex workers to find gainful, alternative, employment. It also impacts the ability to get housing, and exasperates mental health issues for those who have them. Any one of these results, or a variety of them, forces sex workers who may want new employment to stay engaged in sex work or pushes them into poverty.
- Fear of arrest and stigma also increases the likelihood that clients will react violently to sex workers and puts sex workers in more danger. And again, they cannot turn to police should this happen out of fear of being arrested for engaging in sex work.

WHY DECRIMINALIZE?

- Sex workers are people with the ability to discern and we should trust them to make decisions about their work. Policies that criminalize sex work are discriminatory and put their health and livelihoods at risk.
- Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the World Health Organization and other global organizations have come out in favor of decriminalization. And a growing list of local organizations, like HIPS and Casa Ruby, are urging the District of Columbia to take this chance to show the world that progressive, empathetic and informed decision making still happens in the nation's capital.
- We understand and see that criminalization does not eradicate sex work. What it does do, is push sex workers away from resources and support and toward unsafe conditions.
- Where decriminalization has happened, sex workers have reported feeling safer, are in a better position to turn down clients, and are more likely to access targeted health and education programs.

Resources:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/amnesty-international-publishes-policy-and-research-on-protection-of-sex-workers-rights>

<http://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/2017/01/sect2-1701.html>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21040176>

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/07/19/sex-workers-risk/condoms-evidence-prostitution-four-us-cities>

<http://www.desireealliance.org/conference/Sex%20Work%20and%20the%20Law%20-%20case%20for%20decrim-2.pdf>

<https://dctranscoalition.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/movealongreport.pdf>