

March 3, 2022

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned, support the “SESTA and FOSTA Examination of Secondary Effects for Sex Workers Study Act” or the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act to study the impact of losing access to internet platforms on the health and safety of sex workers. As organizations working across diverse communities, we are committed to meaningfully improving the health, safety and wellness of people who trade sex.

Sex work is an important path to economic survival for marginalized individuals and communities. Systemic discrimination can lead LGBTQ people in particular to sex work. In a 2015 survey of transgender people, 19% reported doing [some type of sex work for food, money, or a place to sleep, with significantly higher rates for trans people of color](#). Transgender people engage in sex work at a rate [ten times](#) that of cisgender women. Further, criminalization, discrimination by service-providers, and stigma make people who trade sex more vulnerable to violence, victimization and exploitation. [One study of sex workers in New York reported that 80%](#) had been victims of violence, including 27% at the hands of police. Twenty-three percent of LGBTQ murder victims on the [2012 Anti-Violence Project report](#) were killed while engaging in sex work. Transgender women across the country, particularly transgender women of color, [report police profiling them as sex workers](#) even when they are [engaged in activities](#) such as gathering with friends in a public space or walking down the street.

Many people who trade sex rely on access to internet platforms for safety and security, and to enable harm reduction techniques. Sex workers and direct-service providers anecdotally know that access to internet platforms improves the health and safety of sex workers. [One study](#), currently under peer review, demonstrated a correlation between the creation of online venues for people who trade sex through Craigslist’s adult services section and a drop of 17% of female homicides. However, in the last several years, numerous platforms have either been seized by federal law enforcement such as Rentboy.com or shut down due to increased and vague criminal and civil liability due to the passage of FOSTA/SESTA. Community organizations and direct-service providers for sex workers around the world have anecdotally reported a widespread destabilization of sex worker communities.

The loss of access to internet platforms, the venues through which sex workers have been able to make ends meet, has pushed many sex workers who were previously independent into other street-based work, working for managers, and with third parties. This can lead to a decrease in income, which many sex workers have indeed reported. This has, in turn, led sex workers to work with more clients in order to make up lost income, including those clients who have previously been banned for theft and violence.

While sex workers and advocates have widespread anecdotal information about the consequences of losing access to internet platforms, no rigorous study has been conducted to

assess the full impact of the loss of internet platforms for the health and safety of sex workers, who are frequently amongst the most marginalized members of our society.

This bill directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct a study to assess the unintended impacts of losing access to internet platforms on people who trade sex and their communities and requests a report from the Department of Justice on the impact of the law in anti-trafficking efforts. As anti-trafficking policies and practices are carried out, policymakers must consider the collateral consequences and ask whether current policies and practices are the most effective way to achieve the important goal of reducing exploitation and trafficking. This study will focus on those who are most impacted by the loss of access to internet platforms and recognize that these community members should not be made more precarious and vulnerable to violence and exploitation as a result of anti-trafficking policies and law enforcement actions.

In developing anti-trafficking policies, the impact on people who consensually trade sex is frequently not a consideration. Because many people choose sex work when their options are limited by systemic discrimination, it is important that anti-trafficking policies be designed to avoid further harming or stigmatizing sex workers. Policies and practices must be effective in reaching their intended goal and must weigh the collateral consequences of their enactment. This study would be the first Congressionally-directed, national study to evaluate the impacts of policies intended to prevent trafficking on people engaged in consensual, transactional sex work. We invite you to support the health and safety of people who trade sex by better understanding the unintended impacts of anti-trafficking policies by being an original co-sponsor of this landmark legislation.

***The SAFE SEX Workers Study Act is supported by the following organizations:***

18 Million Rising  
Advocacy for Principled Action in Government  
Advocating Opportunity  
AIDS Foundation Chicago  
AIDS United  
Amara Legal Center  
American Atheists  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach  
Assembly Four  
Athlete Ally  
Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition  
BAYSWAN (Bay Area Sex Worker Advocacy Network)  
Black and Pink  
Black and Pink, MA Chapter  
CARES of SW MI  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
Center for Democracy and Technology

Charm City Care Connection  
Collective Action for Safe Spaces  
Color Of Change  
Counter Narrative Project  
Defending Rights & Dissent  
Disabled Sex Workers Collective  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Fight for the Future  
FORGE, Inc.  
Free Speech Coalition (FSC)  
Freedom Network USA  
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality  
Hacking//Hustling  
Human Rights Campaign  
Human Trafficking Prevention Project  
Kairos Action  
Lambda Legal  
Massachusetts Bail Fund  
MediaJustice  
MPact: Global Action for Gay Health & Rights  
National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)  
National Harm Reduction Coalition  
New Frameworks  
New York Anti-Trafficking Network  
Oasis Legal Services  
Organization for Identity and Cultural Development  
Peer Wellness & Recovery Services, Inc.  
Positive Women's Network-USA  
Prostasia Foundation  
Public Citizen  
Red Canary Song  
Reframe Health and Justice  
S.T.O.P. - Surveillance Technology Oversight Project  
Sero Project  
Sex Workers Outreach Project - Los Angeles  
Sex Workers Outreach Project USA  
Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center  
Strippers United  
Support Ho(s)e  
SWOP Behind Bars  
SWOP Sacramento  
The Center for HIV Law and Policy  
The Center for Sexual Pleasure and Health  
The Moore-O'Neal Law Group, LLC

Transgender Law Center  
Treatment Action Group (TAG)  
Urban Survivors Union  
Whitman-Walker Health  
Whose Corner Is It Anyway  
Win Without War  
Womankind  
Woodhull Freedom Foundation