

Dear New York State Senate and Assembly Members:

The New York Alliance Against the Legalization of Prostitution (NYAALP) comprises leading organizations committed to promoting human rights for all and ending human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation and sexual violence for human beings, especially against women and girls. Formed by leading anti-trafficking advocacy and women's rights organizations, statewide, national and global coalitions, sex trade survivors, and other experts, NYAALP members have worked tirelessly toward the successful passing of key legislation to protect victims and survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In particular, NYAALP member organizations have for decades played a leading role in strengthening New York State laws that hold accountable sex traffickers and their confederates, including sex buyers, the men who generate the sex trade's profits. NYAALP members also invest in ensuring that social services are offered to victims, including undocumented immigrants, and in allowing victims to vacate prostitution and related convictions; educating and training relevant stakeholders, including groundbreaking interventions in the hotel and travel industries.

We are writing to you in staunch opposition to the proposals set forth by several of your colleagues to sponsor a bill aimed at decriminalizing prostitution and pimping, which in effect would legalize the sex trade wholesale, including brothel-owning, illicit massage parlors, escort services, and the buying of sexual services in New York.

NYAALP strongly supports legislation that would *solely* decriminalize prostituted people (those who are bought and sold), who are overwhelmingly women and girls of color. We adamantly believe that New York must not criminalize individuals for their exploitation.

As sex trade survivors, advocates, lawyers and social workers, we know the truths about the commercial sex industry. Every day, we see the brutality suffered by people in prostitution at the hands of sex buyers, pimps, and others who profit off their suffering. We hold the countless stories of friends, family members, and our agencies' clients who were exploited, raped and beaten on a daily basis. Prostitution is not inevitable; it is a cause and consequence of profitable systems of abuse of power and abuse of the vulnerabilities of marginalized populations, which the state must address through strong laws, policies and investments to address such human rights abuses.

Should New York State legalize prostitution, the sex trade would become an employer like any other. Prostitution is not "a job like any other," nor is it "sex." The commercial sex industry is a system built on physical violence, sexual violence, race, sex and gender inequalities, and sexual exploitation for third-party profit. It is part of a multi-billion-dollar global sex trade based on abuse of power and abuse of vulnerabilities of human beings who have had histories of childhood sexual violence, foster care,

homelessness, displacement, and are members of disenfranchised communities, or other severe impediments that obstruct their choices in life.

Research shows that repeat sexual abuse by sex buyers and exploiters result in severe psychological trauma and acute and chronic medical issues for people in prostitution and sex trade survivors, including malnourishment, broken bones, dental trauma, burns, stab wounds, head injuries, genital injury, internal injuries, rectal prolapse, hip, neck, and jaw pain, undetected chronic or fatal diseases, sexual dysfunction and transmitted infections, abdominal pain, and miscarriage, to name a few effects. Studies also show that the incidence of rape and sexual violence is rampant in prostitution; and that the majority of prostituted people surveyed would exit if given the opportunity to do so.

It is very important that New York learn from contemporary experiments to address the problem of prostitution through decriminalization or legalization models. Every single argument made for decriminalizing prostitution in New York is refuted by current studies of decriminalization and legalization models in Europe, Canada, Israel, and other places around the globe.

Full decriminalization or legalization of the sex trade renders pimps and traffickers *bona fide* entrepreneurs and business owners. Decriminalization of sex buyers sends the message that men are encouraged to purchase human beings in New York on an open sex market for the profit of exploiters. Knowing that the vast majority of sex buyers are men and an overwhelming percentage of prostituted people are women and girls of color, should New York sanction paid sexual access with impunity, its efforts to reach racial and gender equality would be moot. At the height of the #MeToo movement, when society is beginning to understand the lifelong and devastating impact of sexual violence, sexual harassment and dehumanization, New York cannot declare that if he pays for such abuse, the state will sanction these crimes as legal.

We therefore urge New York State to enact a law that:

1. Decriminalizes *solely* “any person who engages, agrees, or offers to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee”;
2. Continues to penalize the patronizing of prostitution, targeting the sex buyers;
3. Mandates resources for people in prostitution to gain access to comprehensive services, including medical, mental health, housing, substance abuse, educational, and other services to assist in accordance to the their needs, as well as exit strategies, including economic empowerment services, should they wish to leave the sex trade;
4. Maintains the criminalization of pimping and trafficking.

By decriminalizing the entire sex trade, New York would be declaring that prostitution is the equivalent of labor, and that women and girls of color, LGBTQ communities, youth in foster care, and people living at the margins of society are available for sale.

We urge the Members of the New York State Legislature to support legislation that will protect and support sex trade victims and survivors, rather than a law that would conceal the severe harms and normalize the violence endemic to the sex trade.

MEMBERS, NEW YORK ALLIANCE AGAINST THE LEGALIZATION OF PROSTITUTION

