

June 25, 2009

Senator Levesque
Vice Chair, Senate judiciary Committee
Rhode Island Senate

Dear Vice Chair Levesque and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to support the Memorandum in Opposition to H.B. 5044 submitted to you by the Sex Workers Project and to urge you to consider receiving technical support from Ann Jordan, the Director, Program on Human Trafficking and Forced Labor, Center on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at American University Washington College of Law.

The Best Practices Policy Project is an organization dedicated to creating excellence amongst organizations and advocates working with sex workers in the United States. Our organization was established in 2005 and since then has supported several convenings of sex workers in various parts of the country. In 2006 the Best Practices Policy Project was supported by the Urgent Action Fund to create a series of documents explaining best practice approaches to assisting trafficked sex workers that ensure the health and safety of all participants in sex work whether they are trafficked or not. In 2007 and 2008 the Best Practices Policy Project provided technical assistance to a group of community based researchers in the District of Columbia that assisted this group to produce a ground-breaking research report, *Move Along: the Policing of Sex Work in D.C.*, that was released in May 2008 and is available for download at http://www.differentavenues.org/comm_research.html. The Best Practices Policy Project has also organized national trainings for sex workers to assist them in understanding their rights, resisting violence and discrimination and in taking action as subjects with rights.

The Best Practices Policy Project concurs with the submissions from both the Sex Workers' Project and Ann Jordan that measures proposed in H.B. 5044 that will result in the mass arrests of women for prostitution are extremely unlikely to lead to the identification of trafficked women. In our experience, the criminalization of prostitution forces women, men and transgenders who engage in commercial sex to the margins, away from service providers and advocates who could help them. The *Move Along* report released in 2008 found that laws against prostitution prevented these communities from accessing assistance from the police even in extreme situations of rape and physical violence. Unfortunately when sex workers went to the police to receive help, the pervasive stigma and discrimination bolstered by laws prohibiting prostitution meant that police officers often dismissed these calls for help, failed to respond appropriately or at times arrested those in need of assistance.

It is the concern of the Best Practices Policy Project that H.B. 5044, if passed, would drive a wedge between trafficked persons and others in sex work and those who could potentially help them. Criminalization of those who you seek to help is not the answer.

Sincerely,



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