

Tom Forman
Producer, 8 Minutes
A&E

March 20, 2015

Dear Mr. Forman,

The below signatories are advocates for sex workers and survivors of human trafficking. We are writing to request a meeting about your troubling series, "8 Minutes." While we appreciate your desire to give attention to some of the challenging circumstances of those in the sex trade, the tactics of Kevin Brown and "8 Minutes" mislead the public and threaten the rights and safety of sex workers and survivors of human trafficking. In addition, they exploit the lives and images of those in the sex trade, thereby exploiting people from a marginalized and stigmatized population.

The reasons why someone is involved in the sex trade are often rooted in many complex circumstances, including basic economic survival. Addressing these underlying causes for those who wish to leave the sex industry is often a long-term process that involves building strong networks of support, access to economic opportunity, and addressing many factors that make formal employment difficult, such as childcare and prior criminal records. Nonconsensual, filmed eight-minute "interventions" in the lives of those involved in the sex trade, including possible trafficking victims, are ineffective and potentially dangerous. While Mr. Brown may have experience as a vice cop and a pastor, by pretending to be a client interested in sex and surprising sex workers with a filmed intervention, he is not creating the trust and safety needed for individuals to make complicated life decisions. In addition, any exposure of your subjects as people potentially involved in illegal and stigmatized activities puts them at risk for violence, isolation from support systems, arrest, and targeting by those wishing to exploit their now-compromised circumstances. In fact, the local law enforcement community feels that this is "not a method [they] endorse."

For example, in the article that is referenced as the basis for the show, Mr. Brown fraudulently poses as a client to make an appointment with a sex worker, encourages her to exit her situation, and offers her a phone number where he can be contacted. Though in interviews you state that his success rate is "50/50," this intervention occurs after sixty unsuccessful attempts to convince someone to leave the sex trade. When the individual he speaks to eventually reaches out to receive the support Brown has offered, she receives not stable income, job training or housing support, but a bus ticket back to Arizona. This kind of portrayal glosses over the many reasons why people are involved in the sex trade, and presents a quick and incomplete "solution" without any follow-up or on-going support.

We fear that this series also, for entertainment value, reinforces an image of sex workers and human trafficking victims as powerless and requiring the help of a vigilante male rescuer whose motives are not questioned. Mr. Brown is doing this despite the urgings of local law enforcement officials and without support from local service providers (despite there being several in the Orange County area), and remains unaccountable to any code of ethics. This series could encourage copycat initiatives, undertaken by individuals with no background or training, who are possibly well-meaning, or possibly have unexamined desires to interact with potential victims.

There has already been a great deal of criticism of the show from a variety of perspectives. One religious blogger commented that, “This is no way to treat Scripture. This is no way to treat human beings. This is not entertainment.” A number of sex worker activists and organizers have also noted the many problems with these tactics, especially ones taken from the perspective of law enforcement, commenting that “usually being a police officer does not give you great insight into the lives of sex workers.” A Change.org petition outlining problems with the show and its tactics and demanding the show’s cancellation has already received almost two thousand signatures.

Commenters agree that exploiting the lives and images of those engaged in the sex trade for entertainment is disrespectful at best and immoral at worst. The decision to engage in sex work or to leave sex work is complex and personal, and should never be used as entertainment fodder. Supporting those who wish to leave the sex trade is not a simple problem to be solved in a reality television show.

The cornerstone of support services must be respect for sex workers’ and survivors’ human rights and self-determination. Effective services must include:

- A safe environment staffed by professionals who emphasize self-determination
- Confidentiality and privacy to protect individuals’ safety and shield them from media publicity
- Long-term culturally-competent and linguistically-appropriate case management services
- Medical, mental health, educational, employment, language and rehabilitation services
- Comprehensive legal assistance to give individuals access to immigration relief, criminal justice advocacy, and civil claims
- Opportunities for constituent leadership and peer-led services

Considering the lack of these effective services, the dubious and exploitative tactics of Mr. Brown, and the danger in which Mr. Brown potentially puts sex workers and survivors, we find this program unacceptable. We, the undersigned organizations, respectfully request a meeting to discuss this troubling content and how it can be replaced by a responsible and informed look at the sex trade.

Sincerely,

**Sex Workers Project
Freedom Network
Bay Area Sex Worker Network
Desiree Alliance
Persist Health Project
New York Anti-Trafficking Network
New York Harm Reduction Educators
Legal Aid Society
FB consulting
PROS Network
Project SAFE
TransLatina Network
Sex Workers Outreach Project – NYC
Sex Workers Action New York
Sex Workers Outreach Project – Seattle**

**Sex Workers Outreach Project – Chicago
Sex Workers Outreach Project – Las Vegas
Sex Workers Outreach Project – New Mexico
Sex Workers Outreach Project – New Orleans
Sex Workers Outreach Project – Phoenix
Sex Workers Outreach Project – Philadelphia**