



**District of Columbia Council | Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, October 31, 2019
Testimony of the Executive Board of the DC Chapter of the National Organization for Women
(DC NOW)**

The DC Chapter of the National Organization for Women (DC NOW) represents over 750 members in our pursuit of equality for women and girls in the District. The Executive Board of our Chapter is submitting this testimony in support of the Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019.

DC NOW supports the decriminalization of sex work between consenting adults. We believe this will create a safer environment for sex workers, in which they will be less susceptible to violence and more able to report it when it does occur.^{i,ii} Some evidence suggests that decriminalization can encourage condom use and decrease sexually transmitted infections.ⁱⁱⁱ Some sex workers also believe that decriminalization may improve reporting of sex trafficking by strengthening relationships and communication between sex workers and police.^{iv,v} Furthermore, decriminalization will likely reduce the stigma associated with sex work.ⁱⁱⁱ

DC NOW applauds the bill's creation of a task force to study the effects of the enacted legislation, as well as the breadth of constituencies represented. It is important that the effects of this bill be measured over time, including any effects on the prevalence, detection, and other aspects of sex trafficking. The Metropolitan Police Department should continue to explore effective ways to prevent and prosecute human trafficking, which will remain criminal in DC, as well as to locate and identify trafficking victims. Those identified, especially youth and other vulnerable populations, should continue to be referred to services, which should receive funding comparable to their needs.

While we believe that this bill will reduce harm to some of DC's most marginalized residents, this bill should not be enacted in isolation. Following passage of this bill, the Council must continue to engage with sex workers and advocates through the task force and other mechanisms as necessary to identify and respond to sex workers' most pressing needs. These may include vacating previous sex work-related convictions for sex workers so that a history of sex work is not a barrier to employment. Funds should be allocated in the DC budget to provide additional social support for sex workers, as well as victims of human trafficking, such as housing, health care, employment assistance, and outreach to connect them to services.

We recognize that, for some, sex work is a choice and DC NOW respects individuals' rights to bodily autonomy. We also recognize that some individuals engage in survival sex and would prefer to earn money and other necessities by alternate means if they were available. We support programs and services that expand alternate opportunities so that all DC residents have access to employment options that meet their needs.



We thank the committee for their time and appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. DC NOW supports the Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019 and we look forward to seeing how this bill supports the populations it is intended to serve.

ⁱ Amnesty International. (2016). *The Human Cost of "Crushing" the Market: Criminalization of Sex Work in Norway*. *The Human Cost of "Crushing" the Market: Criminalization of Sex Work in Norway*. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur36/4034/2016/en/>

ⁱⁱ No Justice No Pride. (2018). Community Support & Response Storytelling Project. Community Support & Response Storytelling Project. Retrieved from <https://www.nojusticenopride.org/stories>

ⁱⁱⁱ Global Commission on HIV and the Law. (2018). Global Commission on HIV and the Law: Risks, Rights & Health. *Global Commission on HIV and the Law: Risks, Rights & Health. United Nations Development Programme*. Retrieved from <https://hivlawcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/HIV-and-the-Law-supplement-FINAL.pdf>

^{iv} Fernandez, Fabian Luis. (2016). "Hands Up: A Systematized Review Of Policing Sex Workers In The U.S." Public Health Theses. 1085. <http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/ysphtdl/1085>

^v Talarico, E. (2018, July). Our Liberation Requires Decriminalization — Debunking Sex Work Myths. Retrieved from https://www.nojusticenopride.org/debunking_sex_work_myths