



DEEP  
SOUTH  
**DECRIM**

Community  
Statements on  
Decriminalization

*Compiled by the Sex Worker Advisory  
Committee and Women With A Vision, Inc.*

*These comments are made from a place of wanting to be really clear about the specific purpose of this ask which is for educational material to advance the safety of sex workers in Louisiana on a legal level.*

- Marika Maypop



WOMEN  
WITH A  
VISION



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# WWAV TESTIMONIES

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# SWAC TESTIMONIES

Sex Worker Advisory Committee



## MARIKA MAYPOP

Hello Committee, thank you for your time. My name is Marika Maypop. I am a resident of Orleans Parish and I have been a sex worker for 16 years.

Everyday society reminds me that I should feel ashamed for the work I do and discriminates against me for doing it. My existence is diminished and made a mockery of -- the jokes range from patronizing and dismissive, to demented & violent. Criminal penalties for sex work allow this stigma to continue and further exacerbates it.

Yet I remain proud of what I do. Sex work has allowed me to live independently, to attend college through a masters degree without debt, to gain crucial skills that empower me, to financially support my family, to have time to volunteer in my community, and to have a livelihood where I directly witness the beneficial impact of the services I provide.

The constant conflation of consensual sex work with trafficking insists that I need rescuing from the fully conscious choices I make. What I need is basic respect and rights, not rescuing.

We all make choices to make ends meet. Sex work is very often an intelligible response to social, economic, and political realities; it is a strategic equation for those who choose to engage in it. As with any other occupation, our attitudes about the work vary.

For me, I understand my work to be a calling, a passion, and a vital service aiding individuals to find connection, acceptance, and transformation. I am trained as a counselor and a Reverend. My labor as a sex worker is to support whole-body wellness, including emotional and psychological intimacy. Most of us have been deeply hurt by conditional love—told we have to be a certain way, believe something, or do something to receive it. The way I see it, my job as a sex worker is to provide unconditional love under the condition of payment.

Under current law, this makes me and my clients criminals. I am a criminal when a man weeps in my arms for the inability to find safety in his own body after a childhood of neglect. I am a criminal when I empathetically listen to a woman speak of her painful divorce preventing her from experiencing emotional connection. I am a criminal when I work to position the two bodies of a couple living with muscular dystrophy into a loving embrace because their caretakers are too uncomfortable to support their right to sexual expression.

I am also a criminal when I seek housing and healthcare when I interact with educational institutions. I remain a criminal even as crimes are committed against me. There is nothing inherently dangerous, damaging, or violent about providing sexual services for finances or goods. Just like any other industry, what is dangerous are the conditions under which the work takes place. Criminalization, regardless of its purportedly benevolent intentions, places sex worker's in harm's way.

When sex workers labor without legal protections, we are vulnerable to being seen as "easy, soft targets" and any amount of violence can occur without repercussion and without anyone to turn to. I am here today because so many people I love dearly have been denied access to mainstream job opportunities due to their gender presentation, chronic illnesses & disabilities, or their history of sex work and sex work is their most viable source of income. I am here on behalf of sex workers who have experienced intimidation, extortion, and rape at the hands of law enforcement, and for all of us that live our lives in constant fear of being harassed, assaulted, or incarcerated due to our labor being seen as not worthy of protection.

Rather than pushing stigma, discrimination, and false narratives about sex workers, Louisiana legislators need to listen to sex workers who are best positioned to speak to our realities and needs. What we need is the removal of laws that criminalizes our means of generating an income and our attempts to stay as safe as possible in the process. What we need is full decriminalization. This bill would remove penalties for adult consensual sex workers like myself. It would keep the very necessary protections for minors and prohibit coercion, exploitation, and human trafficking. This bill simply relieves the State of wasting resources by intervening on the choices of two consenting adults and frees up resources to effectively and meaningfully respond to the needs of all Louisiana residents for a greater quality of life.

I urge committee members to compassionately support the full decriminalization of sex work through the passage of HB67 and to commit targeted resource investments for sex workers so that all beings, without exception, can be free from violence, respected, and valued.

Thank you.  
Marika Maypop

# SWAC TESTIMONIES

Sex Worker Advisory Committee



## STACEY SPECTACULAR

Greetings,

I want to start by thanking you for your time. My name is Stacey Spectacular. I am a resident of New Orleans and have been a sex worker for a decade.

I live my everyday life as a criminal. Though I do nothing to hurt anyone, my job is criminalized. Over the last 100 years, the state of Louisiana has engaged in a dangerous government overreach that threatens not only my bodily autonomy but prevents me, against my will, from fulfilling my civic American duties. Tasks like fairly paying my taxes and contributing to the economy on a larger scale; like buying a house and pursuing the American Dream.

It is not just myself, but an entire industry of hard workers who wish to legally participate in American society. Regardless of how hard we work, the right to participate fully is being prevented by this state's policies against sex work. On the opposing end of this overregulation and overreach, is the inability of those criminalized to fairly and rightfully access the privileges and protections afforded to them as U.S. citizens. Privileges like accessing the police to report assaults and trafficking attempts against themselves or coworkers.

I have been raped on the job, multiple times however, I have never reported these assaults due to my own eventual incrimination and potential incarceration. In the pursuit of law & order, this state continues to criminalize those who seek to work justly, and it affords unintended protection to those who seek crime and chaos.

# SWAC TESTIMONIES

Sex Worker Advisory Committee



## AMIRA BARAKAT AL-BALADI

My name is Amira Barakat Al-Baladi and I live in New Orleans. Thank you committee members for your time and attention. A lot of people I love are sex workers and I am here today to advocate for us and myself. I am the founder of Heaven On Earth, a supportive spiritual community for sex workers and survivors. After healing myself from sexual trauma, I created a platform for other sex workers to do the same thing and support each other. Because we are criminalized we don't have access to the support we need to heal after we are violated at work, in intimate relationships, or in other spaces, so we have had to create it for ourselves out of necessity. I know firsthand because this is my story.

When I was raped by a man I left the strip club with, there was no one I could call for help. My friend and coworker had introduced him to me after I confided in her that I hadn't met my goal that night and I needed more money to pay my bills. She pointed out the nice-looking, handsome man in a suit and said, he's still got money and he wants to hang out after the club but I'm tired and I'm ready to go home. It was against the rules to leave the club with customers so I met up with him at the nearby gas station. I was leaving my legal sex work job, stripping, to do illegal sex work, known as escorting or full-service sex work. It's basically the same sexually free behavior that millions of consenting adults engage in every day, but because I was getting paid for it, it was an illegal act. I'm only speaking publicly about it now because the statute of limitations has passed. He raped me because he knew he could get away with it. I was willing to consensually have sex with him but it became rape when he removed the condom and forcibly held me down so I couldn't get away from him as he raped me unprotected. After he raped me I just had to deal with it myself because I already knew I wouldn't be believed anyway and if I went to a hospital or police station for help I would be criminalized and possibly arrested. I couldn't deal with any more trauma that night so I just went home in shock.

I had to wait 3 months to take an HIV test because that's how long it takes for the virus to be detected after exposure. After that, I didn't feel safe in my relationships or going back to work, but I had to. I had no one I could talk to about it. Even my friend blamed me when I told her what happened. We live in a society that blames people for being raped instead of blaming the one who raped them. Arab Muslim women like me can't come forward about rape and sexual abuse without being potential victims of honor killing for bringing shame to our families.



All people risk shame, stigma, and not being believed if they come forward about being raped. If we're sex workers, we risk being arrested, retraumatized, and sexually assaulted by corrupt cops who see us as easy targets. For someone who is already struggling with bills or experiencing housing instability, this financial and emotional burden could put them over the edge.

So much of mental health and financial stability is related to strong community support. Sex workers exist at the intersections of so many forms of discrimination that we are often excluded from community support. This has direct adverse health outcomes. When sex workers are unsupported and underresourced, it directly contributes to social decline. In the absence of strong community support for the individual, the state is supposed to step in and provide that infrastructure. In this case, no extra infrastructure is even needed. Simply removing criminal penalties from sex work-related offenses will free up countless individuals in our state who are living in fear for their lives every time they go to work. They can support themselves when their rights to work safely are protected. This lifts the quality of life for everyone in the community as sex workers are parents, family members, loved ones, people who support local businesses, and people who contribute positively to the culture. The more support we receive, the more support we can give. So many sex workers support so many people whether they are their dependants, their other family members, or simply people in the community they are connected to. We are not just hoarding our wealth for ourselves, we are using it to fill in major gaps of care. We're not hurting anyone. People have always done sex work because it pays a living wage.

For those who think decriminalizing sex work would contribute to the social decline, I hope you know that many of us contribute positively to society. We create businesses and non-profits and social enterprises that are needed in our communities, funded directly by our sex work money. For those of us who are seen as contributing to social decline via drug use, poverty and homelessness, criminalization will not help, it only makes things worse. People in bad situations will do whatever they have to do to survive, and it could be much worse than engaging in consensual sexual transactions. We need full decriminalization because any regulation of our work could severely disenfranchise the most vulnerable among us who don't have the financial capital or ability to access certification and licensure should that become a requirement. Additionally, how can consensual interactions between adults within the scope of intimate relationships be regulated? Sex workers are human and so are our customers. They're also family members, providers, and loved ones. We don't want them to be criminalized either. Being criminalized helps no one, it only fills already overcrowded institutions with people who have not hurt anyone while making it impossible for any of us to seek healing and justice when we have been harmed. For the good of humanity, I ask that you decriminalize sex work in the state of Louisiana by voting in favor of HB67.

Thank you for reading.

# SWAC TESTIMONIES

Sex Worker Advisory Committee



## ARIEL QUINN

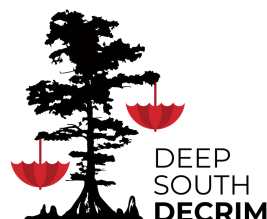
My name is Ariel Quinn, thank you for taking the time to hear from us. I have lived and worked in Louisiana for 8 years. I am currently a student at UNO, and I expect to graduate next spring with a BFA in studio art and a minor in history. I began doing various forms of sex work 6 years ago because I sought a job that allowed me the time to aid my community and the flexibility to work on art. With this free time, I have been able to attend various training sessions, such as first aid, overdose response, and community medicine. Most importantly, I have been able to help other alcoholics and addicts. Just over 5 years ago, I was an active alcoholic until I began a process of recovery. My belief in God and dedicating myself to helping others has been the chief reason I have been able to stay sober these last few years. Through my experience with drugs and alcohol, alongside my experience with sex work, I have been able to help many sex workers along the path to spirituality and recovery.

I started doing sex work full time when I was about 2 years sober, for the reason I've explained, and never looked back. Through the work, I have discovered connections with people, and probably not the type of connections you would generally guess. Most of my job is talking. I can talk to people who live a life completely separate from my own. These people expose me to ideas and ways of thinking that I'm less aware of in my normal day today. In turn, I can offer them my perspectives and perhaps open their eyes a little as well. The deep truth in these exchanges, as I've experienced it, is that we are all the same in a way. We all struggle with daily challenges, big and small, with insecurities and loss, and we all seek comfort from others when we are lonely. We are all looking for our place in the world, and hoping that this journey of discovery also pays our bills.

Through my work, I can take certain precautions, using security measures to keep myself safe, but not all have this luxury. The vast majority of workers are at the mercy of the night, with no legal recourse against bad actors. Most sex workers who have attempted to report violent attacks have found very little support from law enforcement, and are often prosecuted themselves simply for admitting their line of work. This prejudice extends to question the credibility of any sex worker, and most sex workers hesitate to report any crime they witness or are subjected to, on or off the clock. Sex workers disappear, never to be found, or only found after meeting a tragic end. We do not ask for help from official channels and rely only on the help we can offer each other.

This is why we are here today. We are here, asking you to help us. We are asking you to repeal these 13 laws and decriminalize our work. These laws, which no doubt were created to protect us, are actively harming us. We are here to tell you that we don't need saving, by anyone or anything, except these 13 laws. As you have likely noticed, most of us are rather intelligent. As you probably see as we stand in front of you united together, we are organized. And because of this, you can be sure that if we ever need anything more from you, we will tell you. If we see another individual or group that needs your help, we will tell you. But here, today, what we need from you more than anything, is to vote in favor of this bill. If more needs to be done after that, to curb violent crime or human trafficking, you will be hearing from us.

Thank you,  
Ariel Quinn



# CHRISTINE LOBRE

Program Director,  
Women With A Vision, Inc.



Good morning Members of the Administration of Justice Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my testimony in support of House Bill 67. My name is Christine Lobre and I am a Program Director at Women With A Vision, a community-based organization with the mission to improve the lives of marginalized women, their families, and communities by addressing the social conditions that hinder their health and well-being. At Women With A Vision, we employ a harm reduction framework in our advocacy, health education, and trauma-informed, culturally affirming, supportive services. I have worked in the public health sector. I have worked as a community-based counselor and I am also a former sex worker.

My professional experiences as a public health practitioner, a licensed professional counselor, and as a sex worker has informed my approach to the call for the decriminalization of sex work. During my tenure at Women With A Vision, I assisted in developing a diversion program out of Orleans Parish Municipal Court for people charged with sex work-related offenses, as well as a program for women held in Orleans Parish Prison. Throughout my work, I have learned firsthand who is criminalized in our state for these offenses. I have also learned that the same populations who are criminalized for sex work are often criminalized as survivors of gender-based violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking.

This fact is appallingly overlooked by those who create laws to criminalize consensual sex work in their efforts to reduce sex trafficking.

The people that are criminalized for sex work-related offenses while enduring the harms of violence and coercion are not merely collateral damage in the anti-trafficking movement. They are mothers and caregivers. They are our community members, but they do not receive equal protection under the law. The same significant racial, class, and gender disparities that exist in the policing and prosecution of sex work-related offenses, also exist in the criminalization of survivors. So, the question is, why criminalize the labor of consenting adults when we know that survivors of trafficking and violence are ensnared in the same net? If we know that prohibition drives exploitation and blocks access to trauma-informed resources, why do we continue to criminalize consensual acts between adults?

Criminalizing sex work does not and has not stopped sex trafficking. The solutions that we employ must match the problems that we claim we're fighting and as we've learned, the criminalization of sex work does not decrease the risk of sex trafficking. The criminalization of sex work has been proven to increase the risk of vulnerability to force, fraud and coercion into sex trafficking. Criminalizing sex work puts sex workers at an increased risk of housing and employment discrimination, physical and sexual violence, and poor health outcomes by blocking access to needed resources. That's why public health and human rights organizations, from the World Health Organization to Amnesty International, have called for the decriminalization of sex work.

In conversations with people who do not support sex workers or the decriminalization of sex work, one of the things that I hear most often is that there is a lack of approval for the work. Statements such as 'you're selling your body, 'you're being exploited, or 'I would never do it are at the forefront. Rarely do I hear what I assume is their justification, that they think they know better than the adults engaging in this labor. That they know what's best for them is their rationale for wanting to imprison people for choosing this work and the only way to help them is to arrest them. It's fine that people do not approve, but that does mean this labor should be criminalized.

There are many jobs that people in Louisiana choose to labor in that I think are harmful, dangerous, or involves serious risk. I think about our offshore workers risking their lives to make a good living. I think about our construction and sanitation workers, our healthcare professionals, service industry workers, and day laborers putting themselves at risk to earn a living in the middle of a pandemic, our young people who join the armed forces, potentially risking their lives, so that they can create a better life for their family, pay for school and attempt to escape generational poverty. I want better for all of us. I want safer working conditions for all of us. I want for no one to have to choose a job or profession because it is the only way that they can sustain themselves and their families.

But that's not the world in which we live. In Louisiana, with poverty rates that continue to lead the nation, with more than half of Louisiana's families living below the poverty line or considered 'working poor', with deep wounds caused by mass incarceration across the state that prevent people from securing employment, education, and housing, so many of Louisiana's residents are left to choose their field of labor based on what's accessible, as well as what's best for them and their families. It is their right to choose their labor. It is also their right to have access to labor protections and safe working conditions. It is their right to labor free of the fear of criminalization because ultimately, no one should be put in jail for consensual labor that causes no harm.

For these reasons, I ask you to vote in favor of House Bill 67.

Respectfully,  
Christine Breland Lobre, MHS, MPH, LPC  
Women With A Vision, Program Director

# TESTIFY! SEX WORK IS WORK!

Lakeesha Harris,  
Director of Reproductive Health and Justice  
Women With A Vision, Inc.

My mother was a sex worker. One of the oldest professions for women, Sex Work was a supplement to any income my mother could get and the only income when she couldn't get other work. Clients or "friends" paid our stays at hotels when we were homeless, or rent and other bills when we had a place of our own. As a second-generation Sex Worker, who utilized Sex Work to get myself through college and to care for my children – while working many jobs, I want to impress upon you two main points out of the many that can be argued for Sex Work. First, Sex Work is work. Many people engaging in Sex Work, do it out of survival. Second, Sex Work is not Sex Trafficking. A great deal of social activists and advocates working for the survival of women and children get this one wrong, especially at the great detriment of Sex Workers.

We at Women With A Vision Inc., and a great many Sex Worker rights advocates define Sex Work as the consensual, transactional labor that adults of all genders may engage in by trading sexual services for money or goods. Most sex workers trade sex out of circumstance to meet economic needs such as healthcare, housing, or childcare. People may enter into Sex Work due to experiencing employment discrimination in more formal economies because of disability, gender identity, or immigration status. Many find that certain parts of the Sex Work industry have low barriers to entry, and unlike gaining entrance to other jobs in Louisiana, find it a suitable and justified source of income.

Additionally, Black and Brown people experiencing generational poverty and systemic oppression in Louisiana; have also turned to Sex Work as a means of survival. According to the Louisiana Budget Project's 2020 report on Poverty, as Louisiana gains ground financially, most of its wealth continues to line the pockets of White Louisianans. Black families and Black women continue to bear the brunt of generational poverty in this state. We compare that with the sizable increase in the cost of housing, food insecurity, and low-wage jobs being a mainstay in this state, we can understand why Black and Brown Sex Workers are calling for our legislators to decriminalize Sex Work and substantiate their need to exist and support their families.

Even armed with the numbers on poverty, racial disparities, and mass incarceration, most often the pushback on decriminalizing Sex Work comes from advocates who consistently push detrimental narratives. These sensationalized stories, filled with whorephobia and savior anecdotal, continue to undermine Sex Worker survival and consistently get it wrong by conflating Sex Work, with Sex Trafficking. For those advocates, I offer the definition of Sex Trafficking as laid out by the United States Justice Department, “Human Trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons or modern-day slavery, is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labor or services, or to engage in commercial sex acts.”

The distinction here is that Sex Workers are giving their consent for sexual acts in exchange for that which we all need to survive: money, housing, medical care, and goods. This is especially important when we consider how we all have been forced to think about ways we all have needed money, housing, medical care, and other goods within our current global pandemic of COVID -19. Indeed, there is overlap in every area of labor for folks who are subjugated and exploited. For instance, we hear very little from trafficking advocates regarding exploited farm workers and warehouse laborers who are trafficked and made to work for low wages or no wage. What we are positing is that Sex Workers, who are adults consensually engaging in Sex Work, should not continue to endure false narratives that seek to criminalize their work and stigmatize their person.

What Sex Workers know is that survival needs are nuanced and, while exploitation via sex trafficking does exist, so does the labor of Sex Workers who consensually engage in Sex Work. Unfortunately, the law as applied is not making a distinction between consent and non-consent. Law enforcement officers and legislative officials are casting a wide net of criminalization and entrapping victims of trafficking and those who consent to engage in Sex Work, within structures of a divisive and corrosive unjust system. Louisiana continues to mass incarcerate our community and family members knowing full well that they haven't given us the ability fully sustain ourselves.

However, we have the opportunity to be the first state in the South to enact equitable legislation for the residents of Louisiana. For we know that decriminalization isn't the sole answer to poverty, and mass incarceration but it is a huge and revolutionary step in the right direction. We are calling on our legislators to consider the decriminalization of Sex Work via voting in favor of Louisiana House Bill 67 as a more just and humane response to the alternative of continuing to disrupt Black and Brown families trying to survive.



# SUPPORTING ORGS



## **ACLU-LA**

Sex workers deserve the same legal protections as anybody else. The ACLU of Louisiana supports the decriminalization of sex work because no one should have to risk arrest just for seeking health care, protection from violence, or maintaining their livelihoods. We should instead invest in support systems that help people thrive and stay safe. Criminalization only fuels the surveillance, policing, and mass incarceration of trans people and people of color.

## **LA State Representative Mandie Landry (D) District 91**

The criminalization of sex work is harmful to the individual, creating a work environment shrouded in secrecy and distrust. It is also harmful to the community, as it takes productive members out of their homes and puts them into jails. I support decriminalization on the basis of labor rights, harm reduction, and the basic bodily autonomy that all people deserve.

The framework of Reproductive Justice aligns with the call for racial and gender justice that the decriminalization of sex work provides. Decriminalization isn't just about what acts are criminalized. It's also, and more importantly, about who is criminalized and why. With the direct guidance from advocates and those who are impacted by the criminalization of consensual behavior, I support the decriminalization of consensual, sexual labor between adults, which would decrease disparities across race, gender, and socioeconomics.

## **NOFJC- Eva Lessinger, Director of Programs**

As one of the service providers to trafficking survivors in New Orleans, we understand that criminalizing consensual or survival sex work will not make trafficking survivors safer or allow them to come forward for help. Criminalization pushes already marginalized folks further into the shadows when we should be supporting them through harm reduction and economic justice initiatives. We support decriminalization efforts because policing sex work wastes public resources that could instead be used to treat the underlying conditions which allow for exploitation and domination by traffickers—racism, transphobia, sexism, unmitigated trauma, and a completely unjust economic system.

## **DSA**

We all consume the work of sex workers, and these workers deserve compensation and freedom from fear of criminalization. As socialists, we pledge solidarity because this is a fight for bodily autonomy and individual rights, and we are ready to struggle collectively for liberation from the carceral system. Our coalition of Democratic Socialist Chapters and members, alongside community partners, are committed to the campaign to end the criminalization of sex work in Louisiana.

## **Indivisible NOLA- Kenny Francis**

The decriminalization of sex work is a human rights issue because criminalizing adult, voluntary, and consensual sex work is incompatible with the human right to personal autonomy and privacy. Indivisible New Orleans supports decriminalization because no government should be telling consenting adults who they can have sexual relations with and on what terms. Sex work IS work and sex workers deserve the same legal rights and protections as anyone else.

## **VOTE- Norris Henderson, Founder and Co-Director**

When we talk about decriminalizing sex work, we're also talking about who is criminalized and why. We're talking about ending the ways law enforcement surveils and coerces people who have already been pushed to the margins and are trying to survive. VOTE supports the decriminalization of sex work, so that consenting adults, especially those who face employment discrimination due to disenfranchisement, will have access to economic stability, labor protections, and the ability to organize for safe working conditions without fear of arrest or incarceration.

## **Louisiana Trans Advocates**

Economic security and safety is critical to our organization's mission of supporting self-determination for all trans Louisianans. The targeting of survival economies by our criminal legal system does nothing to support marginalized people and only puts sex workers, many of whom are trans, at greater risk of violence and poverty. For this reason, Louisiana Trans Advocates stands in support of the decriminalization of sex work in our state without reservation.

## **Peyton Rose Michelle, Democratic State Central Committee Representative for House District 46A:**

Sex between consenting adults is legal until goods are exchanged. How is that fair? The criminalization of sex work serves only to empower the policing and mass incarceration of trans people and people of color. Instead, we should decriminalize sex work and create systems that nourish our marginalized communities and protect them.

## **Center for Constitutional Rights**

As a member organization of the Decrim NY coalition and as part of our mission to fight for justice and liberation for marginalized and criminalized communities, the Center for Constitutional Rights strongly supports the passage of Louisiana House Bill 366 repealing various state statutes that assign criminal penalties for consensual sexual activity. In 2011, we challenged Louisiana's Crime Against Nature by Solicitation (CANS) statute, ultimately succeeding in declaring this discriminatory law unconstitutional and removing all those convicted under it from the Louisiana sex offender registry. By repealing CANS and other related statutes, HB 366 will limit further criminalization of vulnerable communities and halt the discrimination-to-incarceration pipeline that targets LGBTQIA+ people of color by denying them access to employment, housing, healthcare, and education, and then punishing them for the activities they engage in to survive, as well as subjecting them to increased risk of sexual violence. At a time when the majority of the United States voting population supports the decriminalization of sex work, and disproportionate policing and incarceration of Black and Indigenous people, other people of color, and LGBTQIA+ communities is increasingly condemned, this bill is a timely effort to promote justice and safety for people in the sex trades.

## **Trystereo**

Trystereo New Orleans deeply supports WWAV's work in holding Mayor Latoya Cantrell accountable to her statement by ensuring the term 'human rights' extends to all New Orleanians, especially sex workers. The decriminalization of sex work and drug use are irrevocably intertwined, not separate struggles but overlapping streams meeting in convergence. LA HB 366 would positively impact many of Trystereo's participant base and some volunteer staff who face multiple forms of surveillance, criminalization, and [depending on who you are] racialized violence; all due to participating in the sex working economy. Trystereo, stands with WWAV to put an end to both the implicit and explicit violence sex workers face due to criminalization. Decriminalize sex work, sex work is labor.

## **MaCCNO**

The criminalization of music and consensual sex work in New Orleans have been linked together for over a century, to at least the heyday of Storyville. Just as we work to end the unjust persecution of musical expression, so too should we decriminalize transactional sex work between consenting adults.

## **OPD**

The Orleans Public Defenders Office stands with Women With a Vision and their work to decriminalize sex work in Louisiana. The criminalization of sex work is rife with discrimination, racism, and sexism, and women of color remain disproportionately policed, stigmatized, and harmed by misguided policies that neither ensure the safety of consenting adults or the community at large. It is a waste of resources, increases unnecessary community interaction with law enforcement, and exposes already disenfranchised communities to further abuse and mistreatment. Fully decriminalizing sex work is a critical racial justice and human rights issue, and an essential element toward a more just, less harmful criminal legal system.

## **Operation Restoration**

Operation Restoration stands in solidarity with Women With a Vision's campaign and proposed legislation to decriminalize consensual sexual labor and help end the abuse of sex workers. Our organization works with and supports justice-impacted women. We have seen first-hand how law enforcement disproportionately targets Black, Latinx, Trans, LGBTQ+, and Gender Nonconforming communities. Decriminalization will help protect the rights of sex workers and afford them legal protection and recognition to maximize their dignity, equality, and ability to exercise their rights to justice and health care.

## **Reframe Health and Justice, Kate D'Adamo**

The criminalization of sex work has been a criminalization of survival. When housing providers and schools marginalize and discriminate against trans and gender non-conforming people, sex work has provided shelter. When employers discriminate against people with criminal records, sex work has given opportunities for income. When living wage jobs are scarce, sex work makes ends meet. When parents struggle to find flexible work schedules that lets them both be providers and parents, sex work fills in the gaps. For the many people who are too aware that there is no real social safety net, sex work has kept people fed, clothed, and housed. Criminalization, especially for over-policed communities of color, makes this survival more precarious. Criminalization puts people in danger. Reframe Health and Justice is honored to stand alongside Women With a Vision and the Sex Worker Advisory Committee in calling for an end to criminalization of the sex trades, and in support of the health, safety, and survival of sex workers, their families, and their communities.

## **LaToya Cantrell (D) - Mayor, City of New Orleans**

This is a public health issue, and one we need to discuss openly as a community. Stigma and shame put lives at risk. The City of New Orleans will work to secure and uphold the human rights of all individuals, especially those most at risk of abuse and neglect. All of our residents matter and deserve equal protection under the law.

## **RJ Thompson, Esq., Executive Director, Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center**

Sex work is value creating work. We as sex workers provide valuable services to people who want and need those services. We provide companionship, disability justice work, erotic entertainment, and pleasure to people who need it. We are people of all races, educational backgrounds, religions, genders, ages, and sexualities. We have families who love us. We are good parents to our children. We are workers and worker rights are human rights. We are not victims. We work in the sex trades by choice and/or circumstance. What we need is not pity, judgment, or rescue. We need the full spectrum of our human rights respected, protected, and promoted in the state of Louisiana.

Decriminalization of workers and clients of the sex trades; improves public health, increases safety for workers, destigmatizes consensual adult sexuality, combats human trafficking, creates a platform for accountability for sexual harassment and wage theft in the sex trades, and lessens the burdens of criminalization and its collateral consequences that Black/African people, indigenous people, Asian people, migrants and transgender people face in the State of Louisiana.

## **Real Name Campaign**

Real Name Campaign stands with Women With a Vision's fight to decriminalize sex work. The criminalization of sex work has the same roots as inaccessible name and gender marker changes: the legal system is trying to control our bodies and identities. Many people in the TGNC community also have experience in sex work and are negatively affected by its criminalization. Black and Indigenous TGNC people of color are disproportionately marginalized and/or incarcerated due to these laws. Decriminalizing sex work and having access to correct identification go hand in hand as we work to defend our community.

## **LAFASA**

The Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault (LaFASA) supports survivors of sexual violence, including individuals who engage in consensual sex work and those who are exploited and trafficked. LaFASA opposes policies, practices, and norms that stigmatize already marginalized people; which includes the criminalization of sex work.

## **OPPRC**

The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC) supports the decriminalization of sex work as one step towards the end of mass incarceration in Louisiana. As we work towards racial, LGBTQ+, and economic justice, it is critical that we prioritize bodily autonomy and the rights of all people to live without unnecessary and often violent police interference.

## **Allie Huddleston, Mental Health and Financial Impacts of Police Raids**

The policing of sex workers does nothing to promote their safety. Our study shows that experiences with policing and raids burden sex workers with PTSD symptoms, financial stress, reduced employment opportunities, and increases vulnerability to human trafficking. Decriminalization of sex work is a necessary step to ensure the health and safety of sex workers.

## **BreakOUT!**

BreakOUT!, an organization that seeks to end the criminalization of LGBTQ, Nonbinary, and Gender Non-Conforming youth to build a safe and just New Orleans, supports Bill LA HB366, which will end the criminalization of adults who engage in the consensual transactional labor of trading sex services for money or goods.

Taxpayer money is being wasted criminalizing adults who are consensually trying to earn money. They risk their lives because there are little to no protections, and the consensual transactional act of trading sex services for money or goods is criminalized. Because of that, these adults are often the targets of violence and unsafe working environments. All adults deserve to work safely, and adults deserve access to healthcare and supportive services needed to sustain the quality of life.

The decriminalization of adults who engage in consensual transactional labor will also move law enforcement to end the constant profiling and criminalization of adults who engage in consensual transactional labor. The passage of LA HB366 will be a new day when this unprotected class of workers can feel safe in our state.

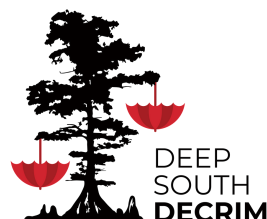
## **Louisiana Coalition for Reproductive Freedom**

Louisiana Coalition for Reproductive Freedom is in support of HB67. This bill protects bodily autonomy and promotes economic justice for the people of Louisiana. Sex work is work. People in our state should have the right to do their jobs safely, without the fear of criminalization. Louisianians deserve the ability to make decisions about the best way to support themselves and their families.

As a world leader in the incarceration of its own people, Louisiana has a lot of work to do to stop locking up our own citizens and to address the deep harm that has been done for centuries by the policing, criminalization, and incarceration of Black and Brown people, poor people, LGBTQ people, women, and all who stand at the intersections of these. This bill is a way to reduce the number of people we take out of the economy and put into the carceral system, preventing family separation and keeping kids out of foster care. By removing the element of criminalization the bill removes barriers that keep people in poverty, as formerly criminalized people are often barred from housing opportunities and good-paying jobs.

Furthermore, the bill is a measure of harm reduction and will protect victims of human trafficking from being arrested when they report abuse. It will also create accountability for perpetrators of abuse who harm consenting sex workers. Currently there is no safe avenue for the reporting of this kind of abuse. Sex workers deserve to be protected and able to report any abuse they experience on the job.

It's just common sense. Let's pass this bill which will stop shielding abusers from accountability, and instead protects the people of Louisiana and safeguards economic mobility.





# COMMUNITY STATEMENTS

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Paul Wnuk

Community Member

"SEX WORK SHOULD BE TREATED LIKE ANY OTHER JOB. IT'S A CONSENSUAL JOB THAT PROVIDES COMPANIONSHIP AND INTIMACY FOR MANY INDIVIDUALS."

Good afternoon,

My name is Paul Wnuk. I'm an advocate for sex workers' rights all over the world, as well as a frequent client. I fully believe that sex workers everywhere should be supported and treated like any other human beings.

I'm writing in support of Bill LA HB67 to decriminalize sex work. With this bill in place, sex workers will be able to continue working in the sex industry without having to worry about being harassed or arrested by police. It will also make it easier for sex workers to find jobs in other areas if they decide to leave the sex industry. Sex workers would also be able to file a police report if they come across a dangerous client or someone on the street who wants to harm them.

In Louisiana, sex workers could face prison time and a fine of between \$500 to \$5000 if caught doing sex work. This can hurt sex workers financially, as they can't afford to pay the fines. It also gives them a criminal record, making it harder for them to find another job if they want to leave the industry.

Consensual sex work between consensual adults should be treated like any other job. Sex workers also should be treated like human beings and be allowed to do whatever job they want.

Thank you,  
Paul Wnuk

## Why do you think sex work should be decriminalized?

Sex work is the oldest profession and sex work is very lucrative. It is a flexible source of income that appeals to people with certain skill sets (modeling and performance, hospitality, entertainment, emotional labor, etc), who want to be their own boss/set their own hours, or who cannot work other types of jobs due to hiring discrimination, disability, family commitments, etc. It also pays far better than most entry level jobs. Flying under the radar as a criminalized gig, it's still a booming industry. However with it being criminalized, it allows for young or vulnerable people to get pulled into the industry by exploitive persons and feel like they have nowhere to turn to if they need help or realize this is not the safe, consensual work that it should be and has been shown to be in other countries with decriminalization. I guess my point is that it's going to happen anyway, but making it illegal just puts the most vulnerable people at risk of danger and being taken advantage of. Right now johns have all the power, especially if they are law enforcement or lawyers, when we should be doing the most to protect service providers instead of demonizing them.

**- Anonymous, Retired Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

Prohibition has historically never worked and only puts people at higher risk of violence. Decriminalization is the only way to actually help trafficked people and consensual sex workers.

**- Anonymous, Community Member - Orleans Parish**

I live and work in a capitalist environment where my employer gains monetarily from my exploitation. He is empowered to bend and break rules where he sees fit. This should be illegal. Not two or more consenting adults making decisions about their money or actions.

**- Anonymous, Community Member - Orleans Parish**

Sex work saved my life. I was able to escape from an abusive relationship, and support myself making more than the embarrassingly low minimum wage in Louisiana. I should be in charge of what I choose to do with my body as an adult woman, and not be at risk of prosecution for doing so. Decriminalizing sex work is so important for the freedom of consenting adults, and is long overdue.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Lafayette Parish**

Sex work is real work. The stigma of workers "resorting" to said industry should be retired to antiquity. Adults of all genders and orientations can enjoy and consent to sex work as a means of achieving their personal goals, whether they be wealth, status, image, paying off debts (primarily medical or academic), as with any industry. Sex work will never disappear, the least we (Americans, Louisianians) can do is create a safe environment, physically, virtually, and medically for sex workers to practice their professions. The American economy has devoured the middle class and the wealth gap is currently over 3x that of the French economy that sparked their revolution. This effectively gives people more encouragement to participate in sex work as a means of support.

**- Anonymous, Community Member - Orleans Parish**

Criminalizing adult, voluntary, sex work is incompatible with the human right to personal autonomy and privacy. A government should not be telling consenting adults whom they can have sexual relations with and on what terms. Criminalization exposes sex workers to abuse and exploitation by law enforcement officials, such as police officers.

Decriminalizing sex work maximizes sex workers' legal protection and their ability to exercise other key rights, including justice and health care. Legal recognition of sex workers and their occupation maximize their protection, dignity, and equality. This is an important step toward destigmatizing sex work. In addition, granting legal protections to sex workers enables them to freely report crimes, such as sexual assault and trafficking, without fear of being jailed themselves.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker**

Tell us how the criminalization of sex work impacts you in your daily life.

A number of friends of mine are sex workers, and I worry about their safety when they tell me horror stories. I'm sad to know it took so long for them to tell me about their jobs because they didn't know how I would react and even sadder to hear the shame in their voice when they do tell me as if they are apologizing even for mentioning part of their realities. I have considered online sex work as a means of healing some of my own trauma and taking control of my sexuality but have been shamed out of even opening an account. The criminalization of sex work bleeds into the stigmatization of sexy women and women who express their sexuality which has made it increasingly difficult for me to express my sexuality without feeling like prey or like I'm "asking for harassment by dressing like a hooker." NO ONE SHOULD FEAR HARASSMENT FOR THE WORK WE CHOOSE; and that work should ALWAYS be a choice. While sex work is criminalized, the obscurity of the industry traps many women and others in unsafe working conditions which leads to health issues and unfair work standards. We need to afford sex workers the same protections as everyone else through decriminalization.

**- Anonymous, Community Member**

Every day is a risk on so many different levels. Risk of physical harm, being arrested, being judged, risk of losing everything...

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

My work is now incredibly limited, especially considering covid. I have stuck to online work as a way to minimize health risks, but FOSTA/SESTA and other legislation have meant that my social media accounts are regularly shadowbanned/removed.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Acadia Parrish**

I am retired, so it doesn't affect me so much anymore. When I was still working I was raped by a police officer and pressed charges, but the investigator did not pursue it. I was robbed of justice due to my profession.

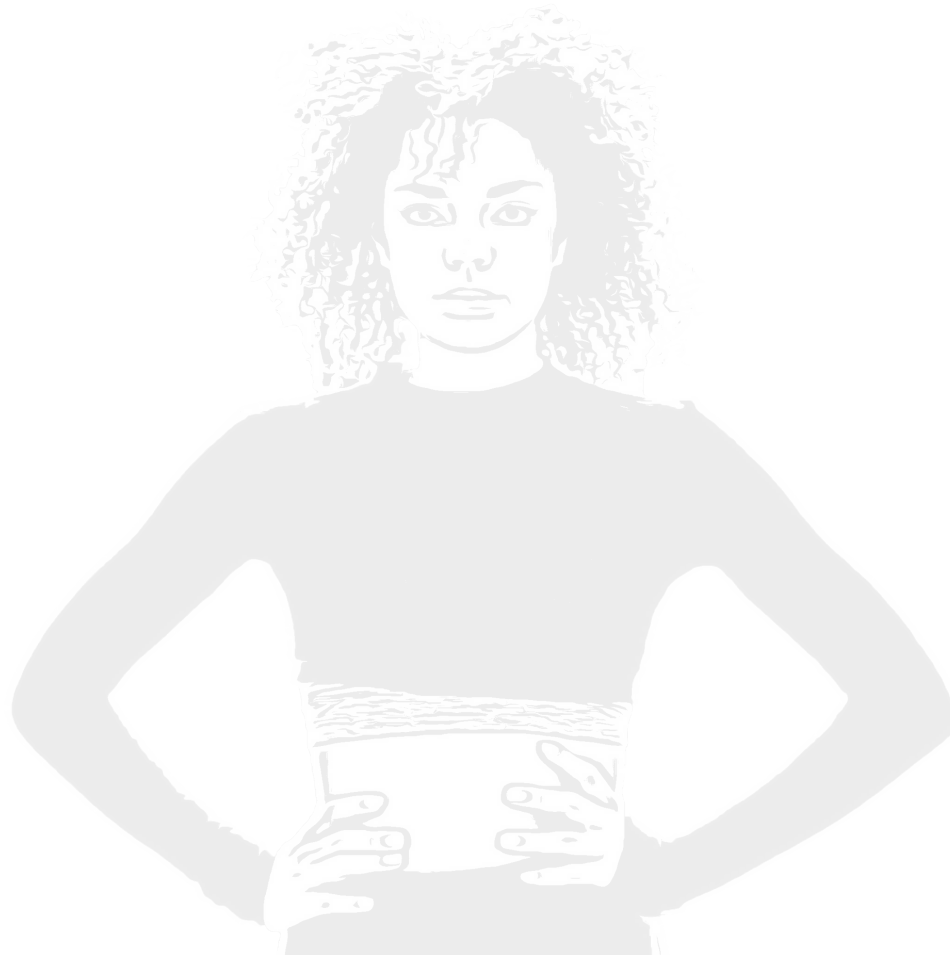
**- Anonymous, Retired Sex Worker - Jefferson Parrish**

I deal with mental illness, and sex work allows me complete autonomy over my work hours and boundaries. I have been mentally and emotionally abused working retail and not even making enough to scrape by.

**- Anonymous, Retired Sex Worker - Jefferson Parrish**

With the stigmatization that comes with engaging in sex work, I already live in constant fear that I will be attacked, doxxed, or thrown in jail for doing something consensual and, in many cases, beneficial to clients who purchase my services.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker**



## What would change for you if sex work was decriminalized?

If sex work were decriminalized it would change the way consent work and sex education could be integrated into the school system and society as a whole.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker**

I would probably do it again because it would be more possible to organize collectives and cooperatives with other sex workers.

**- Anonymous, Retired Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

I would've gotten out of that awful situation sooner. I would've felt more comfortable sharing with people in my life what work I was involved in. I could've taken more pride in the professional skills I was developing and possibly transfer them to another industry if I wanted to. I would've reported the abuse I experienced when it happened instantly or felt more empowered to only work in places that held certain standards of professionalism and did things by the book. I'd probably still hold sessions on the side for extra money, but for now, it's not worth the risk for me.

**- Anonymous, Retired Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

If sex work were decriminalized, I could pursue work without fear that my future career options would be so extremely limited. I could go to work knowing that I would not have to put up with abusive behavior from clients. I truly believe, with decriminalization, my job would be less stigmatized and certainly less dangerous.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Acadia Parish**

I would be able to work more easily and safely. I would be able to help myself get out of debt because my work would be more consistent.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

The first thing that comes to mind is not worrying about my children and the second thing would be not worrying about my bank accounts.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker**

I honestly would be able to not rely on my family for finances. I want to be independent so bad while I go to school as my parents are getting older, and so am I! I want to better myself by going to school and make a wage that is actually livable, sex work gives me that.

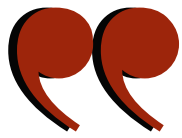
**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

I would feel supported by my community, legitimized by my government, and free to exercise my legal rights as a tax-paying citizen.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker**



How would the decriminalization of sex work positively impact you, your family and your community?



***I can't even begin to imagine. As a sex worker and a mental health professional, I would be able to be out and offer mental health services to other sex workers. I would feel free!***



My community is one of many that loses sisters to sexual violence all too often, because police either can't be called or don't give a f when they're called to protect sex workers. Legalizing sex work would LITERALLY SAVE LIVES in my community.

**- Anonymous, Community Member**

Sex workers are treated as disposable, less than human, when we're just ordinary people. It's your mom, sister, brother, cousin, neighbor, your student, your teacher, so many people turn to sex work out of need or desire, and we're no less deserving of safety and decency. If sex work were decriminalized and regulated like any other industry, it would set a precedent that sex workers are just people working a job and should not be subjected to violence. Decriminalization would reduce violence towards sex workers and, would make the industry more transparent and safer, and would destigmatize sex in general.

**- Anonymous, Retired Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

It erases the stigma around why people are sex workers. It allows for a community to see each other as whole people who need support and allows us to create those avenues of support and protection.

**- Anonymous, Community Member - Orleans Parish**



Well, by me being more financially sound my family wouldn't have to help me pay rent and such. If I'm able to better support myself my self-esteem would be better, which honestly would help all those around me. When folks are able to care for themselves and no longer need to fear for their lives and livelihood the community will always benefit. The community will also benefit because, if I can support myself, I'm much more likely to be able to help others in return!

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Orleans Parish**

It would mean I could be a more active member of my community and contribute tax and live legitimately. My family would worry less about my safety.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker**

I would be able to freely spend time with sex workers that I enjoy. The money spent on their services would go into the local economy.

**- Anonymous, Community Member - Orleans Parish**

As a healthcare professional, I think its effects would be positive in terms of workers getting needed medical care, being able to press charges against abusive clients or cops, and being able to work openly without fear of being arrested.

**- Anonymous, Retired Sex Worker - Jefferson Parish**

***It would be a positive impact on my community by creating legal protection and safety for sex workers.***

If there are any other thoughts or writings you would like to offer, please include them here.

Someone you know is a sex worker. Please find the humanity in your heart to realize that we are just normal people who choose this work, and are navigating this life like everyone else. We deserve to work without fear of arrest or prosecution.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Lafayette**

It's isolating to be a sex worker. Without decriminalization, it is hard to have full access to community resources and networking. I fully believe sex workers are the most amazing people in the world and could create so much change if we were allowed the platform to do so.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker - Orleans Parrish**

With decriminalization and (hopefully) acceptance of sex work as "real work," we would see a safer environment for sex workers, a rise in sex workers' etiquette, and the ability to prosecute abusive clientele would benefit the whole community.

**- Anonymous, Community Member - Orleans Parrish**

Thank you for supporting us. We desperately need working rights and laws that protect us. Sex work is a unique field and attracts those who cannot work a 9-5 job. I choose this work because I'm disabled and studying full time, and nothing else gives me the time and money I need to live my life out of poverty. I appreciate those that support me and people like me. We are not criminals; we are just trying to live.

**- Anonymous, Sex Worker**

**Why do you think sex work should be decriminalized?**

The criminalization of sex work is just another system used to further justify over-policing, incarceration of marginalized peoples, and hypocrisy. By keeping sex work criminalized we are further advancing the nefarious acts of sex traffickers, we are overspending on Petty prosecution and jailing of sex workers. We are diverting important funds and resources from those most impacted, in negative ways, by our society. It is not only foolish but hurtful to criminalize one of the oldest forms of Labor in human history.

**How would the decriminalization of sex work positively impact you, your family, and your community?**

The decriminalization of sex work would ensure that not only can sex workers openly operate, but we can also ensure that there is a level of safety that has been unprecedented before in this line of work. We can actively seek grants and funding for the security of housing, Mental Health Services, and Medical Services. It would mean that our community can support each other in more ways than just taking out of our own pockets. It would mean that all of the many skills and vital values that sex workers have already had throughout their lives and the things that they do, can be shared with the public on a scale that would greatly impact and influence a positive change for society as a whole.

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*Thank you for all of your support, and please continue to educate yourselves, ask questions, be kind, and love.*

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