

DEEP
SOUTH
DECRIM

Towards Sex Work Decriminalization & Justice In Louisiana



Women With A Vision & Sex Worker
Advisory Committee



WOMEN WITH A VISION

With gratitude to these and so many other organizations and individuals that support the decriminalization of sex work in Louisiana.

ACLU of Louisiana

BreakOUT!

Center for Constitutional Rights

Drug Policy Alliance

Fund The People

Human Rights Project of the Urban Justice Center

In Our Own Voice

Justice and Accountability Center

LIFT Louisiana

Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault

Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center

Louisianans for Prison Alternatives

Louisiana Trans Advocates

National Harm Reduction Coalition

New Orleans Worker Center for Racial Justice

Operation Restoration

Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast

Power Coalition of Equity and Justice

Reframe Health and Justice

ReJAC

Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center

Sister SONG

Southerners on New Ground

The Moore-O'Neal Law Group

The Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans

Third Wave Fund

TRANscending Women

Transgender Law Center

Vera Center for Justice

VOTE

The cover art imagery intentionally evokes the history of racialized violence that has erased Black sex workers. The red umbrella is used by the sex workers' organizing movement as a symbol to move from being both invisibilized and hypervisible to spaces where we are simply seen, and heard. The bald cypress is symbolic of the history of our swamplands and Louisiana's native state tree. We have chosen these images to illustrate the violence of being a criminalized sex worker in Louisiana.

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Introduction

"AS IT STANDS, SEX WORK IS WRAPPED UP IN THE LANGUAGE OF ANTI-TRAFFICKING, THE NEW WAR ON DRUGS. AND LIKE THAT WAR, IT FUELS THE INCARCERATION OF MOSTLY POOR BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE JUST AS THAT OLD, MISBEGOTTEN DRUG WAR HAS DONE FOR 40 YEARS."

-DEON HAYWOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WOMEN WITH A VISION, INC.



Citation: Moen, E. (2019)

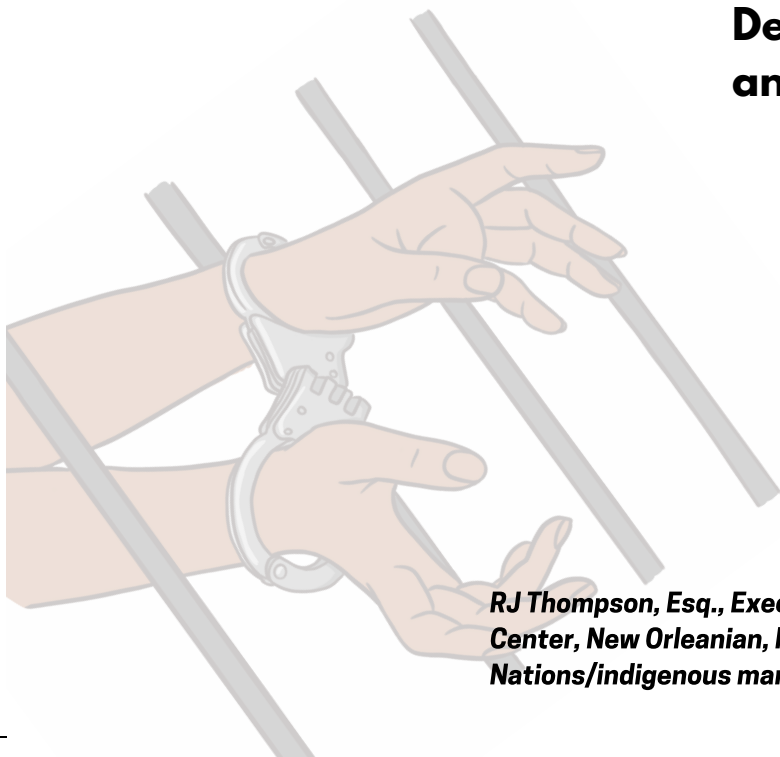
Sex work is value-creating work. We, as sex workers, provide valuable services to people who want and need those services. We provide companionship, disability justice work, erotic entertainment, and pleasure to people who seek it. We are people of all races, educational backgrounds, religions, genders, ages, and sexualities. We have families who love us. We are good parents to our children.

We are workers, and workers' 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
- 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.

RJ Thompson, Esq., Executive Director, Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center, New Orleansian, human rights attorney, Buddhist, sex worker, and queer First Nations/indigenous man





Overview

This Toolkit was developed by the Sex Workers Advisory Committee (SWAC) convened by Women With A Vision, Inc. (WWAV) in 2020 - 2021. This labor was done during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which denied federal stimulus benefits and state funding to sex workers. Many needed food, shelter, and other resources for themselves and their families' survival. Furthermore, many of the disparities outlined in this document have only increased under COVID restrictions. The statistics about sex work provided here, already hard to gather, are probably much more dire.

The Toolkit provides an introductory political education to sex work and criminalization in Louisiana. It explores why adults enter into the commercial sex trade, shows why the criminalization of sex work increases the risk of violence, creates unsafe working and health conditions, and places heavily oppressed populations at increased risk of harm from the prison industrial complex and their actors. It also explains why sex work decriminalization will transform this violence matrix and build a more just and equitable futures for us all.

We acknowledge and uplift the countless individuals--named and unnamed, seen and unseen--who have been part of the struggle for sex worker's dignity and rights. We understand ourselves to be situated in a long legacy of organizing for collective safety and liberation of all those who trade sexual services for money or goods, without exception. We organize with the intention of utmost solidarity with, and accountability to, those most harmed by criminalization. We honor the lives of those who are no longer with us by remembering them and practicing the gifts they left us, learning from the lessons of their lives, and vowing to do what needs to be done to bring forth justice for all those laboring in the sex industry.

We are extremely grateful for Louisiana Representative Mandie Landry for opening her ears, heart, and legislative pen to the cause of decriminalizing sex work. We are equally grateful for the decades of community support that Women With A Vision, Inc. has dedicated to the survival of sex workers and uplifting Black feminist thought and harm reduction through a human rights lens.



WHO ARE WE?

WWAV

“INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE MAKE VISIBLE HOW OUR RESPONSES TO SOME FORMS OF VIOLENCE CONTRIBUTE TO OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND TO THE SYSTEMS THAT UNDERLIE THEM. IN THIS WAY, WE NAME AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE POWER LINES THAT CONNECT US TO ONE ANOTHER THROUGH HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURES AND THE LOGICS, DISCOURSES, AND ACTIONS THAT MAINTAIN THEM.”

— ANN RUSSO, FEMINIST ACCOUNTABILITY 2

Women With A Vision, Inc. (WWAV) was founded in 1989 by a collective of Black women in response to the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in Black communities. Now, more than thirty years later, WWAV is New Orleans’ only queer/lesbian Black women-led organization. We maintain our history in grassroots organizing and harm reduction, while unapologetically engaging in policy advocacy at the intersections of gender, racial, and reproductive justice. Widely regarded as the leading national voice on the criminalization of Black women and girls in the South, we are also a national and international leader in movements for human rights, sex workers’ rights, reproductive justice, and ending mass incarceration. Our history is more fully told on page 40.

SWAC

Sex Workers Advisory Committee (SWAC) is an intentional working group comprised of current and former Louisiana-based sex workers from a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences within the industry. Founded in 2020, SWAC uses a collaborative approach to assess and respond to the needs of sex workers in Louisiana—from community support networks to campaign advocacy. SWAC seeks pathways to justice, dignity, and respect for all sex workers by pushing forward current and future legislative efforts to decriminalize sex work and other related offenses in the state of Louisiana. We seek to inform state officials, non-profit organizations, and individuals of best practices to keep sex workers safe on the streets, indoors, online, and within the community.

Approaches to sex worker organizing are varied and vital. Within this document, we make the case for ending the criminalization of sex workers with a specific focus on Louisiana. The purpose of this toolkit is to identify the ways criminalization harms sex workers, their families, and our community as a whole. We are actively working toward abolition to end harm to all and build the equity and justice our communities deserve.

“HISTORY ISN’T SOMETHING YOU LOOK BACK AT AND SAY IT WAS INEVITABLE, IT HAPPENS BECAUSE PEOPLE MAKE DECISIONS THAT ARE SOMETIMES VERY IMPULSIVE AND OF THE MOMENT, BUT THOSE MOMENTS ARE CUMULATIVE REALITIES.”

— MARSHA P JOHNSON ¹



This toolkit is also a mobilizing tool for all those living and working in the Deep South, including activists and advocates who might pull from it to craft their own campaigns. Our greatest hope is that it furthers the call for the decriminalization of sex work not only in Louisiana but also in other states and jurisdictions. Organizing efforts across the South are too often unrecognized, much less centered, but that does not mean the work is not being done. While New York, California, Oregon, and Washington, D.C. are continuing their campaigns for legislative change, organizers across the South are also working to restore justice to those harmed by criminalization. We hope that this Toolkit is beneficial to all who fight to end these harms and realize justice.



Terms To Know

To ensure a mutual understanding of concepts contained in this Toolkit, we offer these established definitions for the following terms:

Prostitution

Sex Work is the consensual, transactional labor that adults of all genders may engage in by trading sexual services for money or goods. This term is used to acknowledge and center the political implication of a labor perspective.

Sex Trafficking is the “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.”³ Though “sex trafficking” is a commonly used term, it is more accurately described as labor trafficking for sexual commerce.

Sex Trafficking

Prostitution an antiquated term used when sex work is discussed within the bounds of the criminal legal system. This term may be used when discussing criminal codes and legislation or in social discourse. The term prostitution conveys stigma, and because of its link to criminality, may enhance the risk of violence to people in the sex trades.

Disparity is a difference that is statistically or socially significant. In a societal context, disparities exist primarily along the lines of race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, immigration status, primary language, and country of origin. These disparities are driven by systems and policies that institutionalize patriarchal, white supremacy. For marginalized people, disparities lead to detrimental health effects, hyper policing, and limited access to community resources. Often, people mistakenly believe that disparities are the result of personal failures, rather than recognizing that they are markers of systemic violence.

Disparity



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

Tell your story at: bit.ly/voiceityall

“

**“I CAN NOT EVER ASSUME I AM
SAFE OR FEEL SAFE TO TELL
SOMEONE IF SOMETHING WERE
TO HAPPEN TO ME.”**

**– ANONYMOUS SEX
WORKER, LOUISIANA**

”

What Is Sex Work? Why Do People Enter The Sex Trade?

Sex workers, like workers in any other industry, are not a homogeneous group. Their identities and occupations are as diverse as their reasons for entering the industry, and so are their experiences within the industry. Just like other types of employment, sex work is chosen and fulfilling for some, while for others, it is simply a means to access the resources needed for survival.



Figure 20. New Orleans Police Department "mug shot" of women of Storyville. Photo credit, New Orleans Public Library.

Many sex workers trade sex out of circumstance to meet economic needs such as healthcare, housing, or childcare. People may also chose to do sex work because they have experienced employment discrimination due to disability, gender identity, immigration status, or disenfranchisement from past criminalization. Jobs in the sex trades often have low barriers of entry, and allow workers immediate access to wages.⁴

Sex work, like all other jobs, includes both formal and informal economies. The lowest barrier to entry is the simple consensual trading of sex acts in exchange for money or other resources. This type of gig work allows individuals to enter and exit as needed. However, it can also be less safe as a result of prohibition through criminalization. In more formal commercialized settings such as exotic dancing and webcamming, sex work is legal, and while regulated, it is not as heavily policed. The government regulates this type of work through age verification requirements, public obscenity laws, alcohol regulations, and specific state and municipal codes.

Spectrum of Choice



CHOICE

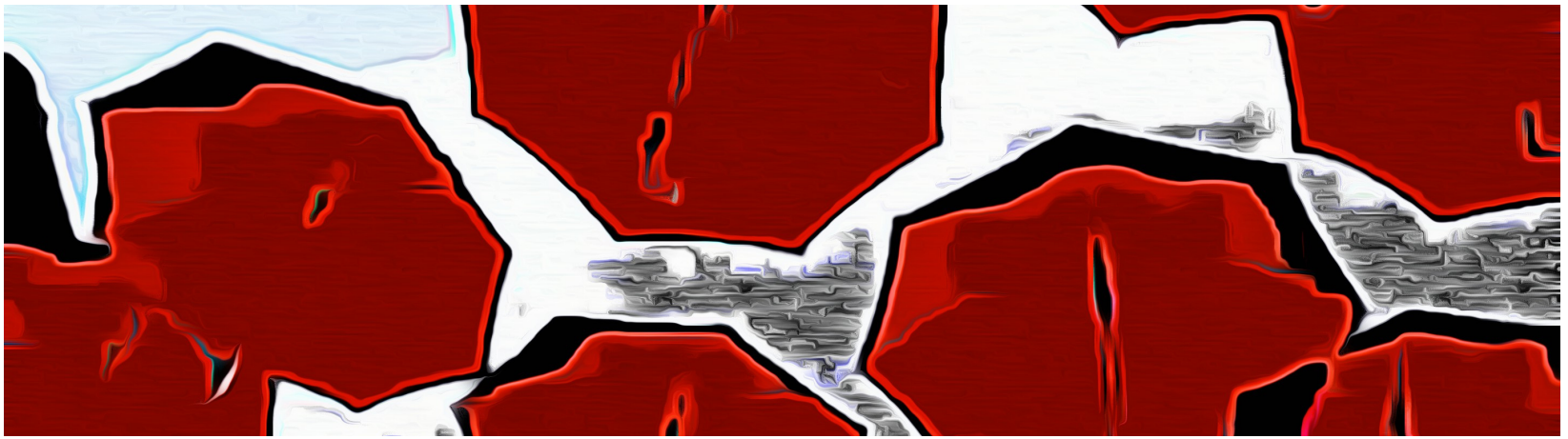
Engaging in sex work with no economic or outside pressure

CIRCUMSTANCE

Engaging in sex work for economic survival (this pertains to the majority of the workers across labor sectors)

COERCION

Forced into sexual labor through violence or fraud (force, fraud and/or coercion is sex trafficking, this is not sex work)



"I GOT INTO THE SEX INDUSTRY WHEN I WAS 18. STARTED OUT DOING CAM AND PHONE WORK, THEN FETISH MODELING, THEN SENSUAL MASSAGE, HAD A FEW SUGAR BABY ARRANGEMENTS, AND EVENTUALLY PRO-DOMMING. I WAS MAKING HUGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY THAT HELPED ME ATTEND COLLEGE DEBT FREE, PURCHASE A VEHICLE, PAY MY FAMILY'S MEDICAL BILLS, AND MORE. I LEARNED A TON OF VALUABLE, MARKETABLE SKILLS (MARKETING, WEB DESIGN, SALES, STAFF MANAGEMENT, CUSTOMER SERVICE, MEDIA PRODUCTION, ETC.)"

- ANONYMOUS SEX WORKER - LOUISIANA

Those who engage in street-based sex work or sex work for survival are subjected to increased surveillance, arrest, and criminal prosecution at alarmingly disparate rates. Escorts and other indoor sex workers typically belong to more privileged demographic groups, and often experience decreased harassment from police. Policing disparities are highest for sex working Black people who are trans, women, and those who labor for survival.

We recognize that the criminalization of people marginalized by cis-heteronormative, white nationalist, patriarchal, and capitalist systems will continue even after the decriminalization of sex work-related offenses. Our abolitionist perspective demands that we dismantle interlocking systems of oppression in their entirety while investing in the ongoing safety and success of those most marginalized. Decriminalization of sex work is one of the many ways we are advocating for freedom, justice, and liberation for all.



No one should have to risk their lives when they go to work, nor should they experience emotional, physical or sexual violence in their place of employment. Access to safe working environments varies greatly for those in the criminalized, informal sex work economies. The ways sex work is criminalized depends largely on the individualized discretion of law enforcement. Discretion by law enforcement has been shown to increase violence, inequity, stigmatization, and discrimination in populations already experiencing marginalization. These harms due to criminalization cause disenfranchisement that blocks access to resources needed for survival.⁵

“

"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."

- LOUISIANA STATE REPRESENTATIVE
MANDIE LANDRY

”

Comparison Chart: Regulatory Models to Commercial Sex Trade



This chart summarizes the differences between Criminalization, Legalization, Decriminalization, and other regulatory models that have been used to police sex work. These models apply only to adults who trade sex. All minors under the age of 18 and non-consenting adults are covered by federal and state anti-trafficking laws.

| | Criminalization | Legalization | Nordic Model or "Partial Decrim" | Decriminalization | Abolition |
|--------------------|--|--|---|--|--|
| LAWS & REGULATIONS | Criminalization enacts laws and penalties prohibiting the exchange of sex for money or other resources is illegal. | Legalization requires government regulation of sex work through licensure. Third parties are often contracted to maintain control over the bodily autonomy and interactions of workers and buyers. | The Nordic or End Demand Model criminalizes the buying and selling of sex by targeting the buyer. Under this model trading sex is not criminalized. However, those selling sex are surveilled to police buyers. | Decriminalization removes and repeals criminal and municipal codes and penalties relating to the sex trade, for both workers and buyers. Decriminalization does not impact or change anti-trafficking laws or penalties. | Abolition involves the complete removal of the carceral system, and the building of systems that guarantee housing, living wages, labor protections, and community-based intervention efforts when needed. |

HOW THIS AFFECTS WORKERS

Criminalization

Sex workers are considered criminals, and may be arrested and prosecuted. Criminal convictions can result in fines, fees and/or imprisonment. This results in a criminal record that can bar future employment. Criminalization leads to discrimination in and blocks access to resources needed for survival.

Legalization

Licensure is not accessible to everyone. Those who are unable to secure or maintain licensure and related documents are criminalized. Managers and brothel owners can become coercive and abusive with little to no recourse for workers. The criminalization that occurs under legalization impacts the same populations as when sex work is fully prohibited.

Nordic Model or "Partial Decrim"

This model claims to not criminalize sex workers, however, it prevents sex workers from negotiating freely and fully screening potential clients. It also increases surveillance of sex workers and their workplaces leading to isolation and limited negotiating power because police seek to arrest clients.

Decriminalization

The selling of sexual services is not a criminal act. Allows workers to pay taxes, claim income, freely organize, access better healthcare services, and advocate for better working conditions. It also removes stigma and associated discrimination. This decreases isolation and risk of exploitation.

Abolition

Abolition allows workers to thrive through life-affirming systems that center human rights and human needs. Workers can operate safely, pay taxes, claim income, freely organize, access better healthcare services, advocate for better working conditions, and live without the stigma and shame that stems from the carceral state.

HOW THIS AFFECTS BUYERS

Criminalization

Buyers are considered criminals, and may be arrested and prosecuted. This could lead to fines, fees and/or imprisonment. Criminalization causes stigmatization and shame for buyers

Legalization

The buying of regulated sexual services is not a criminal act and may be taxed, regulated, and recorded. Some sex acts may not be legal, and those seeking to buy these services would still be considered criminals and may be prosecuted.

Nordic Model or "Partial Decrim"

Impacts for buyers match those under criminalization. Buyers are considered criminals, and may be arrested and prosecuted. Overall, this model means increased policing for buyers and increased surveillance of workers.

Decriminalization

The buying of sexual services is not a criminal act. This removes stigma and criminality of purchasing sex, allowing buyers to more ethically purchase.

Abolition

Buyers will also thrive, as abolition centers the liberation of all. Buyers will be able to purchase sex more ethically, and do so without stigma and shame.

HOW THIS AFFECTS COMMUNITIES

Criminalization

Criminalization of sex work reinforces stigma and shame associated with activities that have been made illegal, further marginalizing families and associates of sex workers. Families and communities may be split up while a loved one is incarcerated. Sex workers, who are often caregivers, lose wages, are denied resources and services.

Legalization

Legalization can lead to more inequality, marginalization, and wealth disparities as certain populations may have more access to obtaining licensure. Legalization also encourages those working without licensure to be isolated from those that do, thereby exposing them to risk of violence and coercion.

Nordic Model or "Partial Decrim"

This model reinforces stigma and shame associated with criminalization, further marginalizing families and associates of workers and buyers. It can lead to more inequality, marginalization, and wealth disparities as certain communities/community members may be better able to operate than others.

Decriminalization

Decriminalization allows communities to thrive, to be able to support each other, and to not live in fear of criminal penalties, fines, or incarceration. Sex workers who are parents or caregivers are able to earn a living wage without fear of separation from their children and families.

Abolition

Abolition allows communities to thrive, to be able to support each other, and to not live in fear of criminal penalties, fines, or incarceration. Through abolition, marginalized communities can begin the process of healing historic relations of trauma with the carceral system and other inequities long perpetuated by state and federal governments.

How Criminalization Harms Sex Workers

"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"

- ACLU OF LOUISIANA

As WWAV and SWAC, we work from the understanding that criminalization itself is a form of violence. Criminalization entrenches racial and economic injustices, including poverty and housing insecurity, both of which are leading drivers of health disparities among Black people, Indigenous people, other people of color, women, and LGBTQIA+ communities. Because of criminalization and the associated stigma, sex workers face employment discrimination. They can also be turned away from health care, harm reduction programs, and housing. These exclusions from sustainable employment and necessary services only serve to further isolate sex workers, thereby increasing their risks for violence at the hands of law enforcement and also their vulnerability to trafficking. Criminalization, thus, directly decreases sex workers' safety and bodily autonomy.



(Above) From Why Decriminalizing Sex Work Would Help in the COVID-19 Fight Image Credit: Emily Kask/AFP via Getty Images

(Left) Image Credit from @SWLiberation



Let's break this down:

- Sex workers are harmed by criminalization.
- When people are arrested for sex work, their arrests are routinely reported in local newspapers along with their “mugshots,” which increases stigma against sex workers and leads to stalking, harassment, and other forms of violence.
- The stigma against sex work, which is driven by criminalization, allows law enforcement to ignore verbal, physical, and sexual violence against sex workers. Across the country, police widely treat the rape of sex workers not as a sexual violence, but a “theft of services” or simply a “risk of the job.”⁷



"CRIMINALIZING SEX WORK CAN EXACERBATE A HOST OF ANCILLARY HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, INCLUDING EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE FROM PRIVATE ACTORS, POLICE ABUSE, DISCRIMINATORY LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND VULNERABILITY TO BLACKMAIL, CONTROL, AND ABUSE."

- HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH⁶

- Criminalization blocks access to services for those who have survived acts of violence. Many of the resources that are available to those who have experienced verbal, physical, or sexual violence under the Victims of Crime Act exclude people who have criminal convictions for prostitution.⁸ Legal protections under rape shield laws also fail to include people who have engaged in sex work.⁹ This is based on the faulty logic that pervades our criminal legal system, whereby it is presumed that people who are convicted of a crime cannot also be survivors of violence.
- The people most often arrested for “prostitution” may already face multiple intersecting issues including poverty, illness, disability, immigration status, housing instability, and exclusion from educational, lending, medical, and judicial systems. Due to disenfranchisement, those subjected to disparities in policing are also vulnerable to employment discrimination, access to a safe work environment, and an increased risk of verbal, physical, and sexual violence. Criminalization exacerbates these harms.
- The enforcement of laws criminalizing sex work can lead to forced evictions, arbitrary arrests, investigations, surveillance, prosecutions, and severe punishment of sex workers. Such violations can also have a particularly negative impact on sex workers living in poverty, as well as on their children and families!¹⁰

“

“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 SEX WORKER -
JEFFERSON PARISH, LOUISIANA**

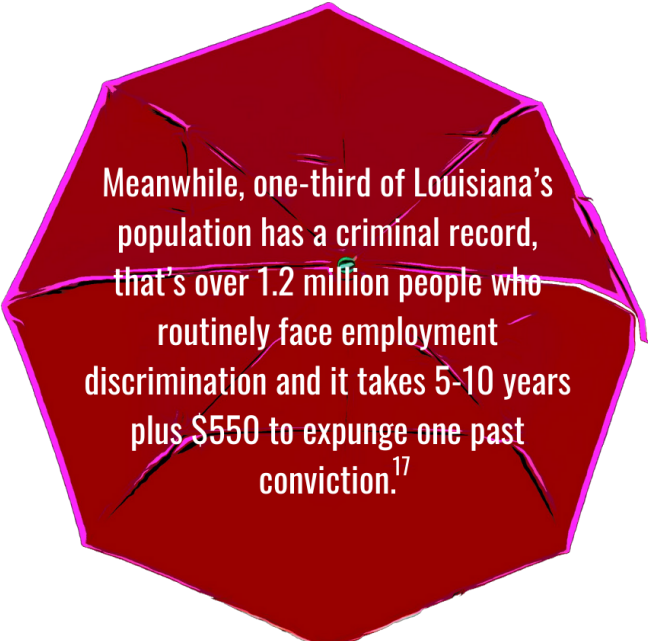
”

Criminalizing sex work doesn't keep it from happening, it just further burdens those who engage in sex work as a means of survival.

For context, consider these facts about poverty in Louisiana:^{11,12}


- Louisiana ranks third highest in the nation for poverty and child poverty rate.
- Roughly 48% of the households in Orleans Parish are led by a single female.
- 67% of that number were working full-time with 58% living at or below the poverty line.
- Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women faced the worst wage gap in Louisiana, earning 47 cents for every dollar a white male earns.¹³
- In a state that depends largely on tourism and the service industries to fund its economy, tipped employees in Louisiana only earn \$2.13 per hour. In 2019, the average annual income for these occupations--jobs, importantly, that are held primarily by Black women--was less than \$19,000 per year.

The criminalization of sex work causes employment discrimination for those who are arrested or convicted. This prevents adults from earning a living wage, especially when they cannot find work in informal economies. Employment discrimination and workplace harassment are common experiences for formerly incarcerated people, queer, gender non-binary and trans people, Black, Brown, and undocumented people.^{4,14} For people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, for those who are transgender or gender nonconforming, and for other marginalized people, a criminal record is a bona fide reason to deny employment.



Meanwhile, one-third of Louisiana's population has a criminal record, that's over 1.2 million people who routinely face employment discrimination and it takes 5-10 years plus \$550 to expunge one past conviction.¹⁷

"Ban the Box" policies that disallow prospective employers to inquire about arrest and conviction histories have proven effective in other jurisdictions. However, Louisiana's "employment-at-will" policy permits employers to fire or refuse to hire workers for any reason.¹⁵ Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act¹⁶ states that employers may not discriminate on the basis of past convictions, because this practice can have an illegal and racially disparate impact due to the mass incarceration of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people. Nevertheless, this discrimination routinely occurs.



“IT [IS] ISOLATING TO BE A SEX WORKER. WITHOUT DECRIM 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 PARISH, LOUISIANA**

Criminalization has proven to be a costly net that traps people living at the margins of society. In addition to blocking employment opportunities, the fines, fees, bail, and lost time associated with incarceration and pretrial detention can place those living in poverty in positions of extreme desperation and vulnerability.

In times of economic crisis, people working informal labor economies will sometimes supplement their incomes by working in the sex trades and other informal economies. People who are caretakers of children and those unable to adhere to scheduled shifts are also the people who may rely on sex work to meet basic needs.⁴



The criminalization of sex work increases economic exploitation. It exacerbates disenfranchisement by blocking an adult’s access to jobs in the formal economy, and also by intensifying the financial, labor, and social consequences of working in the informal economy. These forms of criminalization-associated employment discrimination then further entrench poverty and housing insecurity, especially for our most vulnerable community members.

Sex workers are at increased risk for verbal, physical, and sexual violence in all aspects of their lives because of criminalization.

“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.”

**- VOTE, NORRIS HENDERSON,
FOUNDER & CO-DIRECTOR**

Acts of violence experienced by sex workers disproportionately affect populations that already experience marginalization due to social inequities: people who are poor, Black, LGBTQIA+, gender-nonconforming, people living with mental illness and/or using drugs, and those who are undocumented, unstably housed, or houseless.¹⁸ Crimes of violence against sex workers are continuously underreported because of the fear of criminalization, stigmatization, and further violence and extortion perpetrated by law enforcement.¹⁹

Due to criminalization and the lack of legal protections, sex workers are at an increased risk of verbal, physical, and sexual violence at any time. While violence may be perpetrated by clients, the police also use violence against sex workers. Additionally, sex workers who face stigmatization and lack workplace labor protections may experience verbal, physical, and sexual assaults from other workers in the sex industry, and also from their intimate partners, friends, and family.

“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, LOUISIANA**



- Criminalization of sex work puts sex workers at risk of exploitation, trafficking, and multiple forms of violence.⁴ Engagement in sex work, like other forms of labor, can occur on an everchanging spectrum from choice to coercion. Under criminalization, anti-trafficking laws can harm sex workers. (For further discussion see page 27)
- Sex workers experience rape and sexual assault at higher rates than other labor sectors due to criminalization and lack of legal protections.²⁰
- People also target sex workers for victimization, because they know sex workers are unlikely to report crimes of rape, robbery, or trafficking for fear of further criminalization or retaliation.²¹ The deaths of the Jeff Davis 8 and other sex workers make clear that law enforcement does not prioritize investigations into the murders of marginalized sex workers.²²
- Interactions with law enforcement have been shown to routinely lead to rape or coercion of sex for fear of arrest and/or further violence.²³ Members of the New Orleans Police Department have been convicted of raping, kidnapping, and extorting sex workers.²⁴

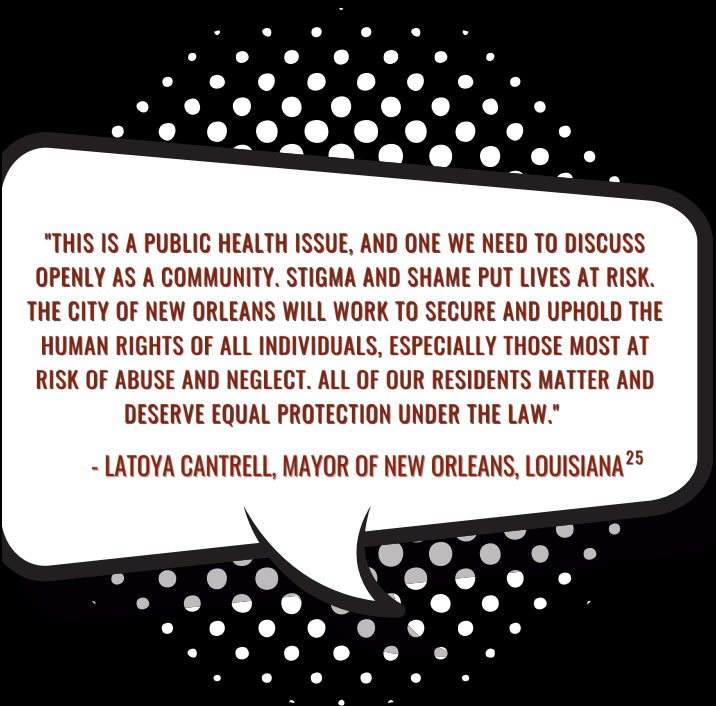


Criminalization is a barrier to safe work environments for sex workers.

* Criminalization prevents sex workers from organizing and working together to increase the safety of their work environments and lives. Because of criminalization, sex workers are subject to perpetual raids and closures, as well as racial and gender-based profiling, all of which decreases their ability to organize for safety.⁴

* Workers in other industries do not face these barriers. Because of the interlocking oppressions that sex workers experience, centering sex workers' rights in the labor movement will have broader significance for all workers affected by poverty, employment discrimination, violence and abuse, illness and disability, racism, and discrimination on the basis of gender or sexual orientation.

* Trying to organize for safer working conditions in spite of these barriers can actually increase sex workers' risks for criminalization. For example, when sex workers organize for safety and rights, they can be charged with conspiracy to commit a felony or as traffickers. Criminalization, thus, is a form of state violence that directly prevents sex workers from protecting their own safety and bodily autonomy. Decriminalization would enable sex workers to craft their own labor protections similar to workers in other industries.



"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."

- LATOYA CANTRELL, MAYOR OF NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA²⁵



(Left) From Decriminalization by any other name: sex worker rights in federal advocacy Image Credit: Carol Leigh Scarlot Harlot/Flickr. (Right) Image Credit: Mick De Paola.

“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.”

- LAFASA

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ABOUT US OUR WORK NEWS & STORIES TOOLS & REPORTS SEARCH TAKE ACTION DONATE

FROM MARGIN TO CENTER: SEX WORK DECRIMINALIZATION IS A RACIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

December 12, 2016

By Jasmine Sankofa, AIUSA Sexual and Reproductive Rights Advocate

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Criminalizing Sex Work Increases Harmful Interactions Between Law Enforcement And Populations Historically Harmed By Carceral Agents

“I CAN'T GO TO THE POLICE TO REPORT/FILE A RESTRAINING ORDER AGAINST A FORMER CLIENT WHO IS STALKING ME.”

ANONYMOUS SEX WORKER -
ORLEANS PARISH, LOUISIANA

Criminalization forces sex workers into extreme isolation to avoid surveillance and the harms that come from interactions with police. Violence at the hands of law enforcement comes in all forms: sexual harassment, stalking, coercion, theft, and sexual and physical assaults. While there have been no convictions of police officers, there are multiple allegations of police murdering sex workers.²⁶



According to research by INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color Against Violence, and by the Sex Workers' Project of the Urban Justice Center, workers in the sex industry are frequently victims of police brutality:²⁶

- 30% of exotic dancers and 24% of street-based sex workers who had been raped identified a police officer as the rapist. Approximately 20% of other acts of sexual violence reported by study participants were committed by the police
- Sex workers across the country report forced public strip searches or demands for sex while in police detention.

Sex workers are at increased risk for verbal, physical, and sexual violence in all aspects of their lives because of criminalization.

Police routinely conduct ‘sting’ operations in the name of investigating sex trafficking to entrap the most vulnerable street-based and survival sex workers. Posing as potential clients, police solicit people they profile as sex workers, offering money in exchange for sexual services. These coercive tactics rely on racial profiling, gender policing, and selective enforcement. This leads to the ongoing mass incarceration of poor, Black, cis- and transgender women who are trying to earn money for survival. Police conflate crimes of human trafficking with incidents of sex work, arresting and prosecuting sexual activity between consenting adults²⁷



Mugshots, Photo Credit: Last Days Of Storyville - myneworleans.com

* Major sting operations in Louisiana are often conducted during periods of high tourism including Mardi Gras, national sporting events, and holidays, such as over Thanksgiving and Christmas, when sex workers, like all workers, are trying to earn extra money to survive and provide for their families.

* Trafficking sting operations that target sex workers rely on sensationalized tales of increased sex trafficking during major events and holidays. They also take the focus off addressing the labor trafficking in restaurants, hotels, and contract cleaning services, which can occur during these times when demands for gig labor peaks.²⁸

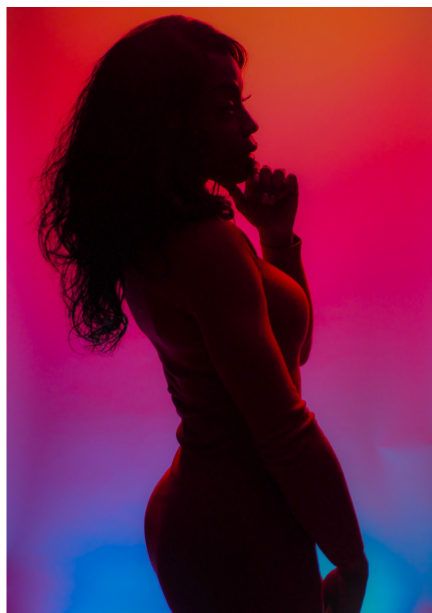
Arrests for “sex trafficking” can make national headlines, and this media attention, as well as funding sources, encourages law enforcement to inflate charges against sex workers and their associates. Police will use online advertisements for escorts to set up meetings in a hotel room or other business and officers arrest everyone, sex workers and proprietors alike,²⁹ on charges of trafficking. Though business owners may have the resources to combat the charges against them and have them dropped, the consensual sex workers who were “rescued” as so-called “trafficking victims” may be incarcerated, fined, and outed in the press.

Criminalizing Sex Work Increases Vulnerability To Human Trafficking And Criminal Activity



"THE CRIMINALIZATION OF MY JOB IS ALWAYS AT THE FOREFRONT OF MY MIND IN AND OUT OF MY WORK ENVIRONMENT. WHILE I AM AT WORK I KNOW MY CLIENTS CAN TURN ON ME AT ANY POINT FROM PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, TO THREATS, TO OUT[TING] ME, TO WITHHOLDING PAYMENT WITHOUT ANY FEAR OF RECOURSE ON MY PART BECAUSE THEY KNOW I AM LEGALLY POWERLESS."

**ANONYMOUS SEX WORKER -
ORLEANS PARISH, LOUISIANA**



Most of those criminalized for sex work-related offenses are already facing multiple forms of discrimination and disenfranchisement. This leaves sex workers with no forms of redress when harms ranging from theft to violence are committed against them. The absence of protection and community support for sex workers creates opportunities for traffickers to exploit people through force, fraud, and coercion. Criminalizing consensual sex trades, thus, increases the potential for exploitation and disenfranchisement.^{10, 30, 31, 32}



Dazed, Photo Credit: László (@zzeroid)

To mitigate harms in this criminalized climate, some sex workers find safety and protection by working with agents. Not all agents are traffickers, but there is an increased potential for exploitation when working with an agent. We believe that public policy should support the autonomy and self-determination of sex workers. Decriminalization gives those at risk of exploitation the power and protection to refuse and report potential coercion.³⁰

Currently, the federal government allocates \$24 million annually to law enforcement agencies for trafficking prevention. Approximately 90% of those funds were used to arrest consensual adult sex workers.³⁴

Despite multiple efforts, law enforcement agencies have failed to identify sex traffickers who advertise through online platforms. Reports show that these efforts have forced traffickers to employ more surreptitious methods. The vast net of the anti-trafficking movement that has failed to decrease sex and labor trafficking risk has diminished sex workers' ability to sufficiently screen clients and increased risk of violence.^{27, 30, 31} Law enforcement cannot and will not save us.

Anti-trafficking enforcement is also failing those who have experienced or are at risk of sex trafficking. In a 2009 study, survivors of sex trafficking reported being arrested on average seven times without any meaningful intervention in the systems of forced labor that were exploiting them.³³ In 2018, according to the FBI, approximately 90% (1,242 of 1,392) of people arrested on trafficking charges were consensual sex workers, not people who were survivors of sex trafficking.³⁴

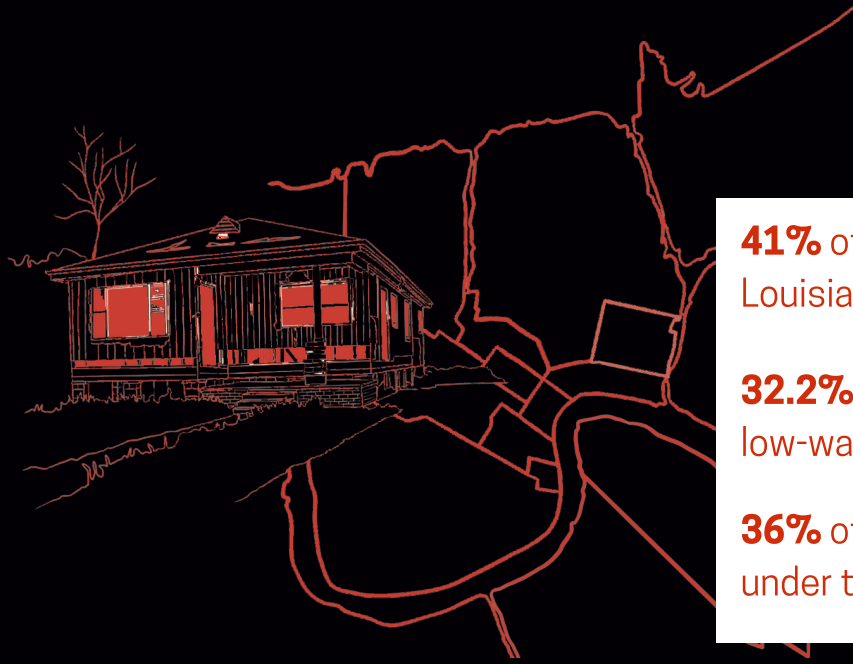
Criminalization is fundamental to Louisiana's history of mass incarceration. This approach has destabilized our workforce and contributed to the highest poverty rates in the country for our residents.^{35, 36}

"MOST PUBLISHED STUDIES RELATED TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SEX WORK ARE BASED ON INACCURATE DATA AND UNETHICAL RESEARCH METHODS. AS THE FORMER GREATER NEW ORLEANS HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE COORDINATOR, I SAW FIRST HAND HOW THE DATA IS MANIPULATED TO CREATE A SPECIFIC STORY."

-ANDREW LEWIS, FORMER GREATER NEW ORLEANS HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE COORDINATOR



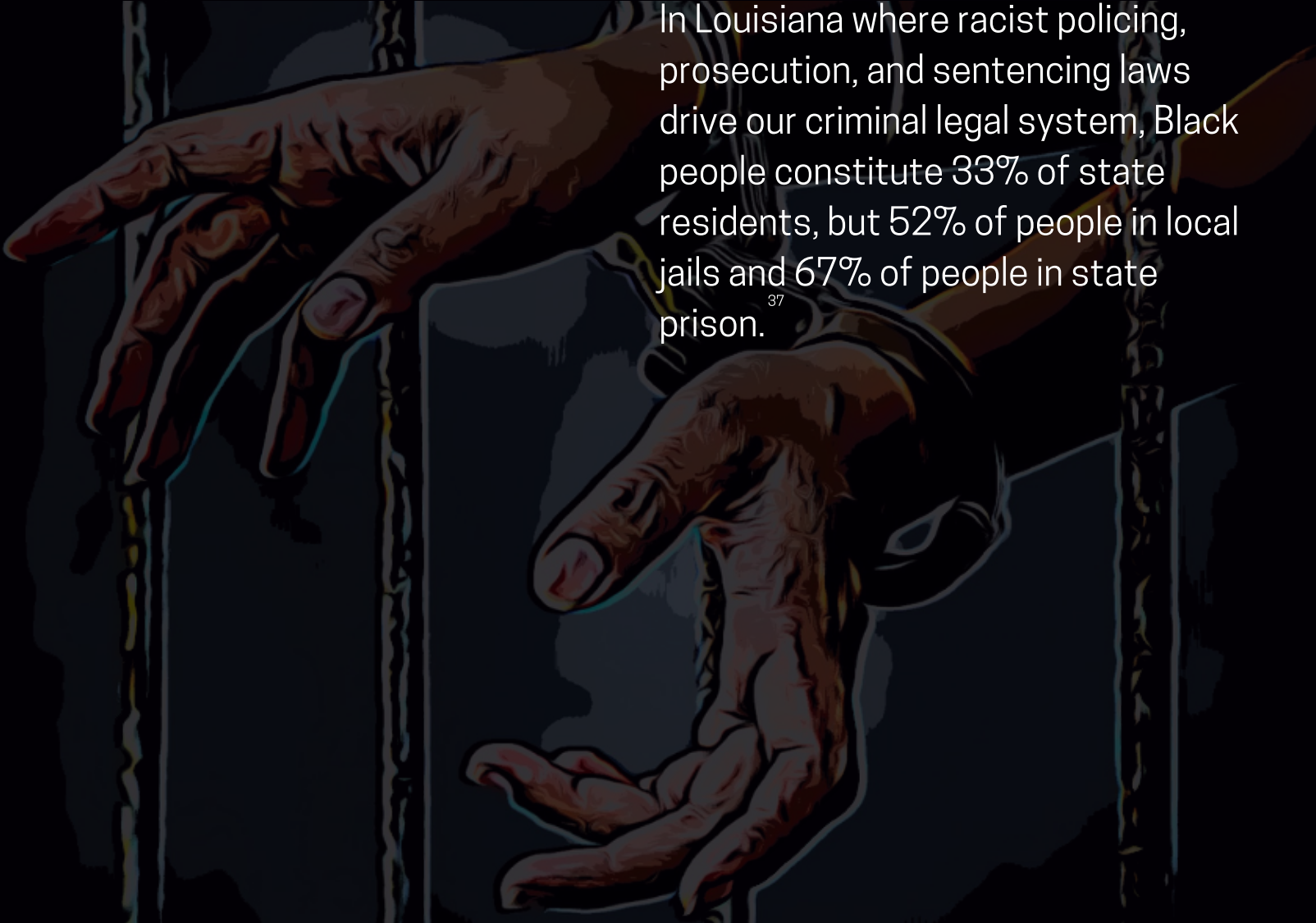
Image Credit: Sex Workers of Storyville, The Historic New Orleans Collection



41% of single parent families in Louisiana live below the poverty line.

32.2% of jobs in Louisiana are low-wage paying.

36% of working families live at 200% under the poverty line.



In Louisiana where racist policing, prosecution, and sentencing laws drive our criminal legal system, Black people constitute 33% of state residents, but 52% of people in local jails and 67% of people in state prison.



"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."

- ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS OFFICE

DECRIMINALIZING SEX WORK IS THE ANSWER!

Individuals who are disproportionately policed and arrested for sex work-related offenses are often living at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, and engage in sex work as a means of survival. Decriminalization of sex work is the only way to advance racial justice, human rights, economic justice, gender justice, and labor rights for us all.^{38, 39}

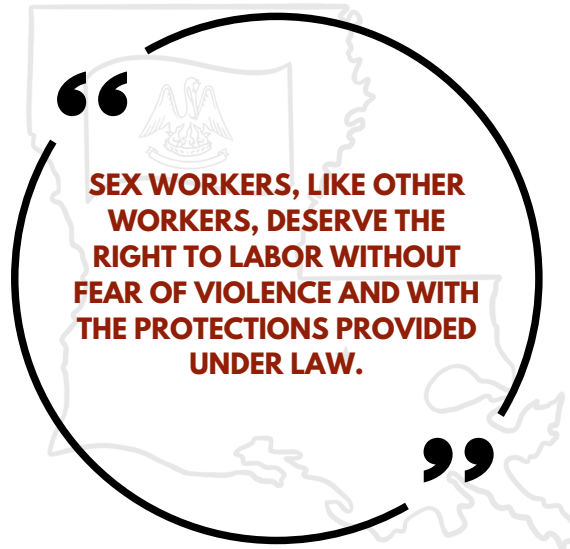
As WWAV and SWAC, we believe that decriminalization is the only public policy that will address the harms documented throughout this toolkit. Decriminalization will:

- Transform the harms of criminalization by removing the criminal penalties that drive shame, stigma, exclusion, vulnerability to violence, and poverty;
- Build equitable and just employment options that end the cycles of poverty and support greater housing security;
- End verbal, physical, and sexual violence against sex workers that is perpetrated by law enforcement, and is exacerbated by interlocking forms of intimate, communal, and political violence fueled by stigma and criminalization; and
- Increase safety and bodily autonomy for sex workers by enabling them to come together to build the conditions of their own living and thriving within the sex trades and beyond.

**“
DECRIMINALIZATION
ENSURES THE MOST
VULNERABLE
GROUPS OF SEX
WORKERS ARE NOT
CRIMINALIZED IN
PURSUIT OF THEIR
BASIC SURVIVAL.
”**



PHOTO CREDIT: EMPOWERING THAI SEX WORKERS: THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF DECRIMINALIZING PROSTITUTION



SEX WORKERS, LIKE OTHER WORKERS, DESERVE THE RIGHT TO LABOR WITHOUT FEAR OF VIOLENCE AND WITH THE PROTECTIONS PROVIDED UNDER LAW.

We imagine a world in which sex workers have access to self-employment and labor protections. We know that this is especially important for people who face employment discrimination, for those who are blocked from earning a living wage in formal economies, and for those who simply choose to do sex work occasionally or regularly. Removing criminal penalties and expunging past convictions will create economic opportunities and allow people to obtain necessary licensing for occupations such as practical nursing, cosmetology, and other living wage work, for which Louisiana requires “good moral character and temperate habits.”⁴⁰



Decriminalizing Sex Work Does Not Mean Legalizing Sex Trafficking

Sex work by
consenting
adults is sexual
labor performed
in exchange for
financial
resources or
goods.

VS

Sex trafficking,
as defined by
federal and state
law, is sexual
labor performed
under force,
fraud, or
coercion or
performed by
anyone under
the age of 18.

According to the U.S. TVPA (Trafficking Victims Protection Act), sex trafficking is "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion,... or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age." **This means that according to U.S. law, adults who consent to participate in the commercial sex industry are not sex trafficking victims.** However, by federal law, any person under the age of 18 who participates in a commercial sex act is automatically considered a victim of human trafficking regardless of the presence of force, fraud, or coercion. Federal law distinguishes between sex work and sex trafficking except in cases involving minors OR cases that involve force, fraud, or coercion. **Bottom line: not all sex workers are trafficking victims. - Greater New Orleans Human Trafficking Task Force.**⁴¹

Sex work is not sex trafficking. Sex workers and their allies are opposed to all forms of trafficking. It is from this position that we warn of the dangers of conflating sex work with sex trafficking. Elements of force, fraud, or coercion define trafficking. For sex workers, consent means having the agency to negotiate the terms and price of their sexual labor, and to decline a solicitation that fails to meet their terms. When we understand these differences, we can see how trafficking victims experience different kinds of harms from consensual sex workers, and therefore need different kinds of interventions.

“

“SEX TRAFFICKING, AS
DEFINED BY FEDERAL AND
STATE LAW, IS SEXUAL
LABOR PERFORMED
UNDER FORCE, FRAUD,
OR COERCION OR
PERFORMED BY ANYONE
UNDER THE AGE OF 18.”

”

Photo Credit: Erik McGregor/GettyImages-NPR.org



The crucial differences between sex work and sex trafficking are routinely obscured by law enforcement. For example, when police threaten consensual sex workers with criminal charges, they may claim they have been trafficked, even when they have not. If a consensual sex worker consents to being treated as a trafficked person in the court of law, this defense can mean avoiding incarceration and being able to access a whole host of resources that consensual sex workers are typically denied. Issues like this make the data we currently have available on sex work and sex trafficking murky at best. Louisiana’s Department of Child and Family Service’s 2020 annual report divides sex worker populations into two simplistic categories, confirmed and prospective victims, without accounting for the circumstances of each individual. The case narratives documenting the arrests and lives of the 927 persons DCFS reported as trafficked could tell us more, but these narratives are not included in the annual report.⁴²

Even without case narratives, the DCFS numbers show a startling pattern of disregard for trafficking victims. Less than 1% were referred to victim's compensation funds though all are eligible, and only 1.3% were referred to safety planning.⁴² Expressed needs by trafficked persons for housing, mental health care, victim advocacy, and other community services often went unfulfilled. This Louisiana data reflects a trend we have seen nationally: people who have been trafficked want support services, but instead are often jailed by law enforcement under the guise of safety.⁴³

**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.**

**-EVA LESSINGER, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS
NEW ORLEANS FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER**

Sex workers' rights organizations and anti-trafficking groups share a commitment to ending trafficking, but their approaches are substantially different. Sex workers and their advocacy organizations work from a harm reduction and interpersonal violence model, and as such are better positioned to assess and respond to the needs and desires of trafficking victims. This commitment to self-determination encourages victims to realize their autonomy and to advocate for themselves. Unfortunately, this self-determinative approach remains severely underfunded.

Anti-trafficking or "rescue" organizations often fail to recognize the personal agency of trafficking victims, and instead direct survivors into narrow re-education and training programs that ultimately fail. These groups also rely heavily on deputizing the public through generalized and often highly racialized and gendered tools to incentivize reporting and surveillance. These groups also support aggressive sting tactics involving law enforcement. Through this combination of "rescue" and "criminalization," anti-trafficking groups have been awarded millions in public monies and public donations to perpetuate the stigma and criminalization of sex work.

The failure to recognize the contexts and circumstances in which sexual labor is performed harms both sex workers and people who experience trafficking. The truth is that criminalization is the product of lawmakers and anti-trafficking myths. The laws do not reflect the desires and needs of sex workers themselves.

Alternatives To Criminalization And Policing Of Street-based Sex Work

Private, sexual activities between consenting adults do not require outside intervention. However, there are times that community members may feel their intervention is necessary.

Criminalization encourages community members to call the police for intervention when they see people on the street congregating or talking to men they assume are clients. The visibility of Street-Based sex work may make some community members feel unsafe—that is how stigma against prostitution works, as well as racism and sexism. And just like with racial profiling, most calls to the police complain about Black, trans, queer, and gender-nonconforming people who are NOT engaging in sex work, but are merely walking or talking with other people.⁴⁴

Police calls for “quality of life” issues are often related to people who are unhoused. This “out of sight, out of mind” approach has not provided any meaningful, long term solutions. It has, however, preoccupied law enforcement, thereby increasing health vulnerabilities, risks of physical and sexual violence, and disenfranchisement. It has also wasted taxpayer resources by preventing local and state governments from investing in the services our communities need and want.

In contrast, sex work that doesn’t happen in public view is rarely reported to law enforcement. **The difference is the setting, not the activity.** Rather than focus on the visibility of alleged solicitation of sex work-related activities, we believe there are meaningful interventions that do not increase harm. These include diverting funds to the root causes for Street-Based, survival sex work. As WWAV and SWAC, we support affordable housing, community conversations to identify alternatives to calling the police, and rerouting calls to harm reduction agencies that have the training to identify people’s service needs.



Diverting funds to the root causes for street-based, survival sex work.

Have more community conversations to identify alternatives to calling the police.

WE SUPPORT AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Legalization Is Not A Solution

Some people suggest adopting a model of legalization, which creates regulations permitting sex work to take place in specific, limited contexts such as brothels. However, legalization sets the terms for who qualifies for a license and terms for compliance in ways that will not undo the harms of criminalization.

The legalization model is used in several Nevada counties and also in countries like Germany, Turkey, and Australia. These examples show us that licensure is limited, and many who want brothel employment do not meet the requirements. People who have a criminal record, who are current or former drug users, who are not born female, or are married can all be denied a license.⁴⁵

Licensed sex work does not ensure autonomy and self-determination. This model requires sex workers to be employed in licensed establishments and increases the potential for management to engage in labor exploitation and rights abuses. Licensure can prevent sex workers from traveling because several nations (including the US) ban visitors who have engaged in commercial sex.⁴⁶ Legalization would not solve the problems the most marginalized sex workers face, and could worsen their disenfranchisement.⁴⁷

“

- WOMEN WITH A VISION -

**DECRIMINALIZE
NOT
LEGALIZATION!**

Legalization will only further criminalize
thoes most impacted.

”

1

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.

2

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.

3

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.

4

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.

CENTER FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

Louisiana Needs To Repeal Sex Work-Related Offenses

“THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF SEX WORK IN LOUISIANA LIES AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF RACIAL AND GENDER JUSTICE, LABOR RIGHTS, ECONOMIC JUSTICE, AND THE RIGHT TO BODILY AUTONOMY.”

The decriminalization of sex work-related offenses in Louisiana will:

- Promote justice for Black, queer, trans, housing insecure, disabled, and poor people by eliminating surveillance, policing, and acts of violence and coercion by law enforcement for allegations of sex work or poverty-related nuisance offenses;
 - Increase labor rights and economic justice in Louisiana by removing legal barriers and expunging criminal records, so sex workers can earn a living wage and organize for labor protections and safety;
- Reduce all forms of violence caused by the stigma, discrimination, and disenfranchisement that results from criminalizing transactional, sexual labor between consenting adults; and
 - Increase safety and bodily autonomy for sex workers and all people who are system-involved in Louisiana, a state which long held the position as the “incarceration capital of the world.”

Decriminalizing consensual, transactional sex between adults means the decarceration of people, predominantly Black, trans, and poor people, who are serving time in jails, prisons or under carceral control across the state.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic forced reductions in jail populations, 1 in 86 Louisianians was under some form of carceral surveillance.⁴⁸ The majority of those in jails are held on alleged “quality of life” charges and are unable to afford their bond. Reducing the incarcerated population in our state by just 10% would save Louisiana \$262 million annually. LA HB67, sponsored by Representative Mandie Landry would help to end the abuses of criminalization in Louisiana for adults who may engage in sex work, for their families, and for our communities.

LA HB67 (formerly LA HB366) Introduced To Decriminalize Sex Work In Louisiana

Based on WWAV's long-established history advocating for sex worker rights and the abolishment of the racialized criminalization of those working to survive, Rep. Mandie Landry reached out to us in the spirit of collaboration. We worked with Rep. Landry and our longstanding co-conspirator, Andrea Ritchie, to assist with Rep. Landry's drafting of legislation that seeks to 'repeal prostitution-related offenses' to end the violence and disenfranchisement of sex workers here in Louisiana. The bill, LA HB67, was initially introduced in March 2020 as LA HB67 but was paused due to COVID-19. It was assigned the new bill number, HB67 when it was reintroduced in the Spring legislative session of 2021.

LA HB 67 INTRODUCED TO DECRIMINALIZE SEX WORK IN LOUISIANA

"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."

-LOUISIANA STATE REPRESENTATIVE
MANDIE LANDRY

What is the purpose of LA HB67?

- To end the criminalization of adults who engage in the consensual, transactional labor of trading sexual services for money or goods.

What will the bill do?

- Repeal specific sex work-related offenses in the state of Louisiana.
- The decriminalization of sex work will strengthen the work to end sex trafficking by creating a safe means for victims and witnesses to report without fear of criminalization.

What won't the bill do?

- It will NOT increase or decriminalize sex trafficking.
- Sex workers and sex work decriminalization advocates want to end labor trafficking. We continue to work to end practices that violate human rights.
- Federal and state laws against all forms of trafficking, including labor and sex trafficking, will remain in place.

In the following months after the bill was authored, WWAV and SWAC researched and wrote this toolkit and put forth recommendations for next steps to end harms caused by criminalization. It is our intention that this information be shared with others working toward decriminalization in Louisiana and with those that would benefit from a deeper understanding of these issues.

Recommendations of the Sex Work Advisory Committee and Women With A Vision

“
DECRIMINALIZATION WILL HELP PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF SEX WORKERS AND AFFORD THEM THE LEGAL PROTECTION AND RECOGNITION TO MAXIMIZE THEIR DIGNITY, EQUALITY, AND ABILITY TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS TO JUSTICE AND HEALTH CARE.
”

- OPERATION RESTORATION

- Decriminalize sex work and sex work-related offenses;
- Release all who have been criminalized for sex work from carceral control;
- Return fines and fees to sex workers who have been harmed by criminalization;
- Expunge, through legislative action, all criminal records pertaining to sex work-related offenses, including “Ban the Box” on employment applications and abolishing “good moral character” requirements for occupational licensing;

- Transfer public monies currently used to enforce criminalization to fund community-based interventions for those who want to leave the sex trade and for those who have been sex or labor trafficked;
- Ensure housing for all in order to reduce street-based sex work for survival and prohibit housing discrimination against sex workers and their families;
- Provide access to culturally affirming, trauma informed, mental health care for all; and
- Acknowledge and transform the violence historically perpetrated against sex workers by private actors, police, media, medical professionals, and other institutions.

Our work, thus, aligns with calls nationwide to decriminalize, de-carcerate, and defund. We approach each of these demands as visions for a more just and equitable future for us all. Decriminalization, de-carceration, and defunding will open up tremendous resources in our city, state, and federal budgets. The resources used for policing, imprisoning, and surveilling sex workers can be put toward labor protection, education, social services, housing, and culturally affirming care that sex workers want and need. This positive vision of society was the foundation of WWAV more than 30 years ago, and it is the vision that the SWAC was organized to carry forward.

History Of WWAV's Advocacy Work In Support Of Decrim In Louisiana

Throughout WWAV's now more than 30 years of work advocating for the rights of all marginalized women in the city of New Orleans, we have learned firsthand about the consequences of criminalizing sex work. When the WWAV foremothers came together in 1989, Black communities were in crisis. It was two decades into Richard Nixon's so-called "war on drugs." Black women were increasingly being criminalized as users and mothers in the context of the crack epidemic and demonized as "welfare queens" in order to justify the gutting of the social safety net. The impacts of these policies were lethal. Rates of HIV infection were peaking, and the numbers of new HIV infections among Black people exceeded those among white people and have ever since.

From their health and human services positions citywide, the WWAV foremothers bore witness to the willful refusal of public health officials to allocate prevention resources to the Black community. The moment that set WWAV into motion was when our foremothers Catherine Haywood and Danita Muse locked eyes in a health department meeting as harm reduction resources were being distributed and NONE of their people's zip codes were on the list. That day, Catherine and Danita did what Black women always do: they set their hands to building what their communities needed. They left with boxes of condoms and immediately set into motion distributing them to their uptown neighborhoods, including St. Thomas, Magnolia (officially "C.J. Peete"), Melpomene, and Calliope Projects.



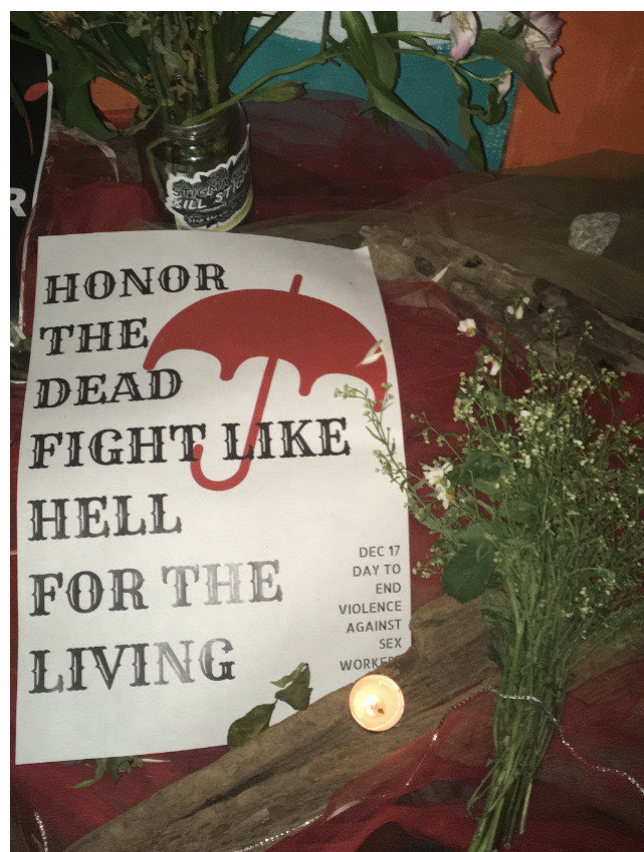
Photo Credit: Los Angeles Times, Tiffany Tenille in the movie "Jezebel." (Array Releasing)

The outreach methods they pioneered in the years to come literally changed the landscape of public health and harm reduction in New Orleans and nationwide. What the WWAV foremothers demonstrated over and over again was that in order to impact health disparities, you had to start by building a relationship. Our foremothers sat on porches talking with people who were using drugs or selling sex to understand firsthand what people were doing, how they were surviving, and what support they needed and wanted. WWAV's work grew from there.

Because our foremothers listened to sex workers, they could get them the tools they needed on their own terms. The people they touched directly through street outreach would pass information and tools onto others in their networks, and those onto others still. That is how our foremothers changed the culture in Black communities around condom use and syringe access and, in so doing, changed the priorities of funders and service providers nationwide.

Gradually, their presence in the community with sex workers and drug users enabled the WWAV foremothers to start producing their own knowledge about precisely how the logic of systemic poverty and the targeted criminalization were driving HIV vulnerability and a whole host of other health issues. They leveraged this intimate knowledge of structural injustice and the social determinants of health disparities to create a unique model of community outreach that continues to guide WWAV's community engagement, advocacy, and research today.

This presence in the community is also how WWAV was able to identify an emergent sex work criminalization crisis in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In 2006, with return rates still waning, our foremothers made their way back to New Orleans.



They asked Catherine's daughter, Deon Haywood, to become WWAV's first Executive Director, and they immediately hit the streets to find their people. Little could have prepared them for the first time a sex worker showed them her license which was now stamped "SEX OFFENDER" in block red letters. What Danita, Catherine, and Deon were able to gather was that the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) was rounding up sex workers and charging them with both a misdemeanor prostitution charge and a felony-level "crime against nature by solicitation" charge (now LA RS 14:89.2). The latter carried mandatory sex offender registration for 10-15 years for one charge, for life upon a third conviction. The enforcement of the law was solely up to police discretion, and NOPD used it almost exclusively against sex workers who were poor, Black, and/or members of the LGBTQIA+ community. That is why the members of our community said that "There is NO Justice in New Orleans." Their words became WWAV's organizing call going forward.



Image Credit: @HaileyAsquin, Sex Worker Liberation on Twitter @SWLiberation

Under Deon’s leadership, WWAV launched our first major policy campaign. Our NO Justice Project was created to fight predatory policing and unequal prosecution and sentencing under the CAN-S law (now LA RS 14:89.2). This call for decriminalization was clear from the people most impacted, and they led every step of the work going forward. Together, we built a grassroots outreach process to build the coalition we needed to bring a legislative challenge to remove the felony charge and sex offender requirement. We then filed a civil lawsuit against the state of Louisiana with Loyola University New

Orleans College of Law, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and attorney Andrea J. Ritchie to ensure that this legislative change would be applied retroactively to all people currently on the sex offender registry list. The victory in that case, combined with steady individual legal advocacy, resulted in the removal nearly 800 individuals charged with CAN-S from the sex offender registry.

The NO Justice policy win was tremendous for everyone in our community. One of the people named in the lawsuit said, “I’ve never been in court and had a judge side with me.” Another explained that she could “taste my freedom.” Nearly every person cried at exactly the same moment: “A judge had decided that the state of Louisiana violated your rights.” That experience of coming together to change the conditions of our lives emboldened the WWAV community and opened a whole new horizon of policy work for us. And so we set our sights on challenging the landscape of criminalization in our city and nationwide, in order to build the care, justice, and equity our people need.

Over the last decade, we have had more policy wins, some with unlikely partnerships. We have also always stayed true to the grassroots approach that was our founding vision and mission. Soon after the NO Justice win, we were able to launch a court diversion program to ensure people charged with sex work related offenses would not have the burden of fines, fees, or a conviction. We have also successfully been able to decrease interaction between law enforcement and people who are allegedly engaging in sex work by working with New Orleans Police Department to draft an ordinance to prohibit police intervention unless deemed absolutely necessary with supervisory approval. Presently, we are working with our newly elected District Attorney to have his office decline to prosecute any sex work related charges. Each step in this now more than 30-year history has brought us closer to the full decriminalization of sex work.

The History of Sex Work & Sexual Labor Trafficking in Louisiana from Colonization to Present

“
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.

—
- MaCCNO

The history of prostitution in Louisiana is long, but the history of prohibition is not. Louisiana has a long history of sexual commerce, as deeply rooted and intertwined as the bald cypress tree on the cover of this toolkit. The rape of Indigenous and enslaved Black women by European settlers and free white men led to the establishment of “Fancy Girls,” plaçage, and quadroon balls in the antebellum era. At the end of the nineteenth century, racial segregation and gender divisions created the setting for the red-light districts of Storyville in New Orleans, Battle Row in Lake Charles, and St Paul’s Bottoms in Shreveport, and later for Bourbon Street’s strip clubs.

In the twenty-first century, we recognize and affirm that autonomy and consent are essential to human rights and bodily self-determination. This has been a hard fought understanding. For much of our history, law and society have used many strategies to limit or deny consent in sexual relations. Institutional racism and systemic disenfranchisement have disenfranchised many people. Combined with stigma against the sex trades, this has perpetuated sexual exploitation and violence against Black people, women, LGBTQIA+ people, and others viewed as undeserving of respect.

The neat labels of “sex work” and “trafficking” are too limited for three hundred years of history. Transactional sex is not always monetized, but rewards (e.g. freedom from bondage) and also considerations e.g. rent and stipends) may be earned. These types of sexual exchanges, in which both free and unfree laborers engaged, do not neatly fall into contemporary definitions of “consensual sex work” or “labor trafficking.” For this reason, we have included examples of historical events and systems that fall outside these categories.

Prostitution has been a crime in Louisiana only since 1942. It was not a crime during slavery. After Reconstruction and until World War II, prostitution was semi-legalized. Trafficking for sexual commerce became a crime in 1910, two centuries after it had been an institutionalized experience for enslaved Black women in Louisiana. And it is only very recently that consensual adult sex work has been conflated with labor trafficking. These tangled roots of institutional racism and sexual disenfranchisement created the current policy of criminalization. We believe decriminalization is the only way to grieve these historic wrongs and abolish the conditions for which criminalization has become the solution.

History of Sex Work in Louisiana (Abridged Horizontal Timeline)

| NO LAWS AGAINST PROSTITUTION SLAVERY (TRAFFICKING) IS LEGAL | | | | | | PROSTITUTION IS LEGAL SLAVERY IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL | | | | | PROSTITUTION CRIMINALIZED SLAVERY / LABOR TRAFFICKING CRIMINALIZED | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|------|------|------|-----------|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|---|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1699 | 1719-1725 | 1721 | 1802 | 1805 | 1817-1818 | Antebellum Period | 1865-1900 | 1880-1903 | 1875-1910 | 1908 | 1917 | 1935, 1942 | 1951-1955 | 1962-1992 | 2005-2009 | 2010-2012 | January 2018 | April 2018 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| European colonization of Louisiana by the Mississippi Company begins; French settlers establish women to the concern of Company officials. | | | | | | <p>Plaçage: formalized extra-marital relationships between white men and free women of color, despite anti-miscegenation laws. Women protected themselves by insisting on legally binding contractual agreements, drawn up in the presence of a notary public, obligating men to pay their living expenses, which could include housing, servants, and guarantees for their children of education and inheritance.</p> <p>Quadronee and Outcroon Bail: Slaveholders realized enormous profits by selling and "leasing" enslaved</p> | | | | | | <p>Louisiana and 12 other states ratify the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude. "Slavery by another name" begins, entrapping Black women in contract leases that permit their sexual exploitation and rape.</p> <p>Cities designate official red light zones: "Soyville" in New Orleans (1897); "St. Paul" in Baton Rouge (1903); and Battle Row in Lake Charles (1903).</p> | | | | | | <p>New Orleans re-defines vagrancy as "loitering" or soliciting for the purpose of prostitution as a criminal offense. Solicitation for prostitution is also made a criminal act for men. (1942) [State neutral in 1977]</p> <p>Congress passes the Selective Service Act of 1917, empowering the Secretary of War to shut down bars and saloons that are considered a public health threat to soldiers and sailors. This finally ends all red light districts.</p> <p>Gay-structured law prohibits men and women from drinking together in public; bars women from the same.</p> <p>US Congress passes the "White Slave Traffic Act" or Mann Act. Outlaws the transportation of women for the purpose of prostitution. "White Slave Traffic Act" had been outlawed under Page Act of 1875.</p> | | | | | | <p>1919 Director Herbert Hoover declares a war on organized crime. US Senator Estes Kefauver holds a hearing about criminal rings that operate gambling, prostitution, and pornography markets.</p> <p>FBI breaks a sex trafficking ring in Dixon, IL, which moved sex workers from Texas to Florida. The ring involved 30 women. Nine men ultimately convicted of Mann Act violations. The women (all white) are forgiven to testify against the ring leader and his male employees.</p> <p>First victim of the Jeff Davis 8, Loreta Lynn Chabon Lewis, is found in the Grand Marais Canal near Jennings, LA. Seven other women, all sex workers who knew each other, are murdered in the next few years.</p> <p>New Orleans Police lobby legislature to amend the state Crimes Against Nature statute to make solicitation a crime. Criminal codes amended requiring all convicted of a felony sex crime to register with the offender.</p> | | | | | | <p>1962 FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover declares a war on organized crime. US Senator Estes Kefauver holds a hearing about criminal rings that operate gambling, prostitution, and pornography markets.</p> <p>FBI breaks a sex trafficking ring in Dixon, IL, which moved sex workers from Texas to Florida. The ring involved 30 women. Nine men ultimately convicted of Mann Act violations. The women (all white) are forgiven to testify against the ring leader and his male employees.</p> <p>First victim of the Jeff Davis 8, Loreta Lynn Chabon Lewis, is found in the Grand Marais Canal near Jennings, LA. Seven other women, all sex workers who knew each other, are murdered in the next few years.</p> <p>New Orleans Police lobby legislature to amend the state Crimes Against Nature statute to make solicitation a crime. Criminal codes amended requiring all convicted of a felony sex crime to register with the offender.</p> | | | | | | <p>2005-2009 First victim of the Jeff Davis 8, Loreta Lynn Chabon Lewis, is found in the Grand Marais Canal near Jennings, LA. Seven other women, all sex workers who knew each other, are murdered in the next few years.</p> <p>New Orleans Police lobby legislature to amend the state Crimes Against Nature statute to make solicitation a crime. Criminal codes amended requiring all convicted of a felony sex crime to register with the offender.</p> | | | | | | <p>2010-2012 Women With A Voice wins a federal case challenging the Crimes Against Nature statute because it discriminated against sex workers. The statute was amended to include sex workers as victims of the crime, only those convicted of solicitation for a crime against nature were unjustly and unfairly labeled as criminals.</p> | | | | | | <p>January 2018 A joint anti-trafficking police force raids Bourbon Street adult clubs in the false belief that they will really prevent sex workers from working safely.</p> <p>Despite the arrest and harassment of hundreds of workers, no cases of trafficking resulted. NODP Street clubs.</p> | | | | | | <p>April 2018 US Congress passes SESTA/FOSTA, co-authored by Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA). Claims to prevent sex workers from working safely.</p> | | | | | |

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Centering: Prayer, Meditation, Affirmation & Our Love

The spiritualities of Louisiana Sex Workers are as diverse as this place we call home. We come from all cultures, backgrounds, nationalities, theologies, and ideologies. Together we have mourned the losses of our families during COVID-19, as well as the losses of extended kin within our community due to acts of violence.

Additionally, we have collectively celebrated our survival and pray to those who have historically provided us with protection, shelter, and love such as Mother Catherine Seals of The Temple of Innocent Blood in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans. Many of us are deeply rooted in Christianity and seek solace in our close relationship with Jesus, and we make room for our siblings as they whisper Indigenous prayers in ancestral reverence and honor African spiritual traditions.

What we know is sex work has never been a practice of exclusion but one of inclusivity and mutual honor and respect. Judaism is welcome. Islam is welcome. Buddhism is welcome, and so is Catholicism, too. We have a feast of love for you here and a place of deep honor. We have always been grounded in collective liberation and rooted in prayer and meditation as a means of survival. We offer the following prayers and meditations, as tools for other sex workers to survive--in this moment and beyond.

And for those who are not spiritual or religious, we ask that you have faith in sex workers, as we have faith in you.



Invocation of Pomba Gira

Beloved Mother of The Seven Crossroads
Guardian of Sex Workers, People of Street Economy, and Travelers
I ask that you guide and protect me and those I love
That you keep us safe as we work
From Police, Violent Clients, and Thieves
Guide me in complete discernment
When I'm unsure
Calm my anxiety and bring me peace

Beloved Seductress
Help me to embrace my power and sensuality
Assist me in being unapologetic and unashamed
Open doors that were once closed
and allow money to flow to me, freely
as rivers flow, unencumbered, by the rocks beneath it

I offer this prayer in supplication of your power
Allowing my words to be an offering
When I have nothing else
And I will surely honor you
when I have plenty
In this, I pray your divine blessing
Oh mother, hear my call.

-Ashe'

Prayer to Mother Catherine Seals

Great Mother, healer, Ancestor
Patron Guardian to the poor
Left out
Abandoned
Mistreated
Dis-eased
Afflicted
We call your name
And the healing energies of your temple
To provide shelter, when there is none
Healing for those afflicted with trauma
Coverage in the name of justice, when there is none
Compassionate love, when there is none

We know that your love superseded
The boundaries of a Jim Crow South
Creating a bridge of healing
For the deeply oppressed

We offer this prayer
That you build a fence of protection
For Sex Workers in Louisiana
That you send a message the spiritual plain

That we are rising



In Liberation!

The Charge Of The Goddess

- ADAPTED FROM DOREEN VALIENTE

Listen to the words of the Great Mother, who was of old also called Artemis; Astarte; Diana; Melusine; Aphrodite; Cerridwen; Dana; Arianrhod; Isis; Bride; and by many other names.

Whenever ye have need of anything, once in a month, and better it be when the Moon be full, then ye shall assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me, who am Queen of all Witcheries.

There shall ye assemble, ye who are fain to learn all sorcery, yet have not yet won its deepest secrets: to these will I teach things that are yet unknown.

And ye shall be free from slavery; and as a sign that ye are really free, ye shall be naked in your rites; and ye shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love, all in my praise.

For mine is the ecstasy of the spirit and mine also is joy on earth; for my Law is Love unto all Beings.

Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever toward it; let naught stop you or turn you aside.

For mine is the secret door which opens upon the Land of Youth; and mine is the Cup of the Wine of Life, and the Cauldron of Cerridwen, which is the Holy Grail of Immortality.

I am the Gracious Goddess, who gives the gift of joy unto the heart. Upon earth, I give the knowledge of the spirit eternal; and beyond death, I give peace, and freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before. Nor do I demand sacrifice, for behold I am the Mother of All Living, and my love is poured out upon the earth.

Hear ye the words of the Star Goddess, she in the dust of whose feet are the hosts of heaven; whose body encircleth the Universe; I, who am the beauty of the green earth, and the white Moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters, and the heart's desire, call unto thy soul. Arise and come unto me.

For I am the Soul of Nature, who giveth life to the universe; from me all things proceed, and unto me must all things return; and before my face, beloved of gods and mortals, thine inmost divine self shall be unfolded in the rapture of infinite joy.

Let my worship be within the heart that rejoiceth, for behold: all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within you.

And thou who thinkest to seek for me, know thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not, unless thou know this mystery: that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee.

For behold, I have been with thee from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.

Psalms 23 - King James Version of The Holy Bible

23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. - Amen

Surat Al-Asr from the Holy Quran

1. وَالْعَصْرِ

By time (it explain that God swears By time).

2. إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ

Indeed man is in loss,

3. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

except those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to patience.

Surat Al-Nas from the Holy Quran

^[1] Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,

The Sovereign of mankind.

The God of mankind,

From the evil of the retreating whisperer –

Who whispers [evil] into the breasts of mankind –

From among the jinn and mankind." ^[2]



QUEER MORNING BLESSINGS / birkot hashachar
written by Dori Midnight & Randy Furash-Stewart

(caress your eyes) Blessed are you, AWAKENER, life of all worlds, who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

(feel your feet upon the solid ground) Blessed are you, GENEROUS CREATRIX, who stretches forth the earth upon the waters.

(receive light, take in your surroundings) Blessed are you, SACRED FLAME, who illuminates and shines upon everyone and everything.

(dust off your shoulders, run your hands across your limbs, touch the fabrics touching you) Blessed are you, HOLY FASHION DESIGNER, who delights in the way we dress ourselves as altars.

(move from tightness to stretching wide) Blessed are you, LIBERATION WORKER, who moves us to stretch and expand towards freedom.

(feel yourself) Blessed are You, DIVINE APPLE ORCHARD, who delights in my delight and is praised by my pleasure.

(touch your heart) Blessed are you, NAMELESS AND INFINITE, who made us in your image and reminds us that all bodies are sacred and holy.

(place an imagined crown upon your head and lift your chin) Blessed are You, WINGS OF GOLD, who crowns my people, all people, with splendor.

(Take a breath that fills your whole body, hold it for a moment, and let it out) Blessed are you, HOLY BREATH, who fills me with this gift every day.

(open your palms in front of you) Blessed are you, ABUNDANCE, who helps me remember I have everything I need.

(let your body move as it wants to move) Blessed are you, THE WAY, who meets me where I am.

(close your eyes and rest) Blessed are you, SOURCE OF LIFE, who I draw on for strength and who reminds me that rest is a sacred act.

(embrace yourself) Blessed are you, FABULOUS ONE, who loves me just as I am.

(place your hand somewhere that needs extra love) Blessed are you, WEAVER OF BEING, who shaped the human being with wisdom, making for us all the openings and vessels of the body. It is known that we are miracles and all bodies are miracles.

Blessed are You, YOU OF MANY NAMES, for revealing infinite paths of healing.

A Dedication of Gratitude to the Ancestors

There are many throughout time that have fought for what we have now. This is a non-denominational dedication of gratitude to those that have come before. It is designed to be said over a deep purple candle but may be freely used, adjusted, and adapted to your own personal beliefs and traditions:

Ancestors of blood, of this land, and of this liberation work; I offer my deepest gratitude, that I may stand here today in your legacy. Whether your name has been exalted by many or forgotten to the tides of time:

I remember you.

I honor you,

I honor that my freedoms

rest on the shoulders

of work done by you.

I thank you,

for your wisdom

your guidance,

your presence.

In your memory, this work continues.

May your memory be a blessing;

may I continue your legacy;

may future generations inherit boundless freedom

as their birthright.



Organizations that support the decriminalization of sex work in Louisiana:

ACLU of Louisiana
Ashe' Cultural Arts Center
BARE
BAYSWAN
Birthmark Doula Collective
Break OUT!
CANS Can't Stand
Center for Constitutional Rights
CHANGE (Center for Health and Gender Equity)
Citizen She
COYOTE RI
CrescentCare
DecrimMA
Deep Down Roots Project
Democratic Socialists of America, New Orleans Chapter
Democratic Socialists of America, Southwest LA Chapter
Disabled Sex Workers Coalition
Drug Policy Alliance
Emily Ludwin Miller, LLC
For The People-NOLA (FTP-NOLA)
Foundation for Louisiana
Front Porch Research Strategy
Frontline Legal Services
Fund The People
Gender Exploration Society
Heaven on Earth Reiki
HIPS
HIV Racial Justice Now
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Indivisible NOLA
Iron and Amethyst Spiritual Communications
Jeanette Maier
Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana
Law Offices of Charles M. Schully
LGBT Community Center of New Orleans
LIFT Louisiana
Living School
Louisiana Coalition for Reproductive Freedoms
Louisiana Coalition on Criminalization and Health
Louisiana Community Health Worker Outreach Network (LACHON)
Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center
Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault (LaFASA)
Louisiana NOW
Louisiana Survivors for Reform
Louisiana Trans Advocates
Louisianians for Prison
MaCCNO
National Council of Jewish Women- GNO Section
National Harm Reduction Coalition
National Performance Network
National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
New Orleans Abortion Fund
New Orleans Family Justice Center
New Orleans Hospitality Workers Alliance
New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice
NOLA to Angola
OD Aid
Office for Gender & Sexual Diversity Tulane University
Operation Restoration
Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition
Orleans Public Defenders' Office
Peyton Rose Michelle (elected official, Lafayette)
Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast
Pond Family
Positive Women's Network USA (PWN-USA)
Power Coalition of Equity and Justice
Prison Health News
Promise of Justice Initiative
Real Name Campaign
Reframe Health and Justice
Rep. Mandie Landry
Reproductive Justice Action Collective (ReJAC)
Sero Project
Sex Worker's Project at the Urban Justice Center
Shift Change
SisterSONG
Southerners on New Ground
Step Up Louisiana
SWOP Shreveport-Bossier City
The Center for HIV Law and Policy
The Curated Misfits
The MindBodyService Collective
the people's uprising
Too Tall Farm & Nursery
TRANscending Women
Transgender Law Center
Trystereo New Orleans Harm Reduction Collective
Turning Point Counseling
Twelve Mile Limit
Vera Center for Justice
VOTE (Voice Of The Experienced)
We Are Dancers USA
what we could become
Women With A Vision, Inc.
Workers Voice Socialist Movement

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Liberation takes a village and in unity, we will co-create a more just world.