



Center for Crime Victim Services
58 South Main Street, Suite 1
Waterbury, VT 05676-1599
www.ccvv.vermont.gov

[phone] 802-241-1250
[phone] 800-750-1213
[fax] 802-241-1253 (Victims Compensation only)
[fax] 802-241-4337 (General fax)

Testimony for House Judiciary H568 H569

Kira Krier LICSW, Director of Human Trafficking Victim Services, Center for Crime Victim Services

Hello, my name is Kira Krier I am the Director of Human Trafficking Victim Services for the State of Vermont. I am here today representing the Center for Crime Victim Services. I am giving testimony in support of a Good Samaritan Bill and forming a Sex Work study committee to further research the impacts of decriminalizing prostitution in our state. The Center rejects the Bill for decriminalization of prostitution(H569). My role as the director of victim services is to research and present to Vermont what is in the best interest for victims of human trafficking this includes laws that potentially impact victims, mental health treatment , drug and alcohol services, transitional housing options and emergency shelter.

Having worked with victims of Human trafficking for the past 6 years at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility through the Network project DIVAS, I have only met one woman who has “chosen” sex work. She reported she was engaging in sex work based on getting her basic needs met, **she** was a prior victim of sex trafficking. This indicates further exploration into this topic needs to be done to determine if this is an issue worth pursuing in the state of Vermont. Each year the DIVAS project for incarcerated women works with approximately 400 survivors of Domestic violence sexual violence and/or human trafficking. It is in the best interest of the state to look at decriminalization with a study committee and speak with women **IN** Vermont who are “choosing” sex work. The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women International (CATW) has conducted 2 major studies on sex trafficking and prostitution, interviewing almost 200 victims of commercial sexual exploitation. In this study most of the women in prostitution did not make a rational choice to enter prostitution. They did not sit down one day and decide that they wanted to be sell their bodies. Rather, such "choices" are better termed "survival strategies." Rather than consent, a prostituted woman more accurately complies to the only options available to her. Her compliance is required by the very fact of having to adapt to conditions of inequality that are set by the customer who pays her to do what he wants her to do. This study supports the woman in Vermont who felt like she had to make this choice in order to survive. She felt like she had no other options available to her. We hear very little about the role of the sex industry in creating a global sex

market in the bodies of women and children. Instead, we hear much about making prostitution into a better job for women through regulation and/or legalization, through unions of "sex workers," and through campaigns which provide condoms to women in prostitution **but** cannot provide them with alternatives to prostitution. We hear much about how to keep women in prostitution but very little about how to help women get out. We in Vermont can do better.

In the Netherlands, women in prostitution point out that legalization or decriminalization of the sex industry cannot erase the stigma of prostitution but, instead, made women more vulnerable to abuse because they must register and lose anonymity. This means the majority of women in prostitution still choose to operate illegally and underground.

People believe that, in calling for decriminalization of prostitution, they are dignifying and professionalizing the women in prostitution. But dignifying prostitution as work doesn't dignify the women, it simply dignifies the sex industry. Decriminalization of prostitution means decriminalizing the whole sex industry not just the women. Are we prepared as a state to look at how that impacts our at risk youth?

Decriminalization of prostitution does not protect women.

Violence that women are subjected to is an intrinsic part of the prostitution and sexual exploitation industry. Women who are sex trafficked had Pimps that used violence for many different reasons and purposes. Violence was used to initiate some women into prostitution and to break them down so that they would do the sexual acts. Women are then forced, coerced, manipulated into continuing to do those sexual acts. In Vermont drugs play a big part in this industry. Women are often given drugs to maintain their obedience, if they do not follow the orders of the pimp drugs are withheld as punishment. Therefore, reinforcing the women's fear and creating a situation where she has **no** choice. Every step of the way violence is used. Pimps threaten and intimidate women to humiliate, isolate and confine the woman. **This is human trafficking.**

I am asking you to consider do we want to create a state that perhaps condones this type of violence.



International trafficking in humans for sexual exploitation is an economic activity driven by profit motives, and up to four million people are estimated to be exploited by human traffickers each year in a \$99 billion industry . Laws regarding commercial sex influence the profitability of trafficking and may then affect the influx of trafficking to our state. This means decriminalization benefits criminal enterprises who profit from sex trafficking.

A personal concern I have as a clinical social worker and as a mother in Vermont is that decriminalization of prostitution sends the message to new generations of men and boys that women are sexual commodities and that prostitution is harmless and fun. Are we ready as a state to support that?

As you can hear I have some strong feelings about researching this topic more thoroughly before entertaining a Bill that could impact our communities with more violence against women and children. In closing, the Center for Crime Victim Services rejects the Bill H569 decriminalization of prostitution. The Center supports (H 568) a Good Samaritan Law and a Sex Work Committee to further study in depth of how this may affect the people who are engaging in sex work here in our state of Vermont

Thank you.

