

1 S.54

2 Introduced by Senators Vyhovsky, Gulick, Harrison, Hart and White

3 Referred to Committee on

4 Date:

5 Subject: Crimes and criminal procedure; prostitution

6 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to repeal the  
7 prostitution laws that currently prohibit “indiscriminate sexual intercourse” and  
8 consensual engagement in sex work for hire by adults while retaining  
9 prohibitions and felony criminal penalties for human trafficking of persons  
10 who are compelled through force, fraud, or coercion to engage in sex work.

11 An act relating to voluntary engagement in sex work

12 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

13 Sec. 1. LEGISLATIVE INTENT AND FINDINGS

14 (a) The majority of Vermont’s laws on prostitution were adopted more than  
15 100 years ago and have remained largely unchanged since that time.

16 (b) Under current Vermont law, the term “prostitution” includes “the  
17 offering or receiving of the body for sexual intercourse for hire and shall also  
18 be construed to include the offering or receiving of the body for indiscriminate  
19 sexual intercourse without hire.”

1       (c) These laws reflect the social mores of the early 1900s, criminalizing not  
2       only voluntary sex work but sexual activity outside marriage, and no longer  
3       reflect Vermont’s commitment to personal and bodily autonomy.

4       (d) Data has consistently shown that the criminalization of voluntary sex  
5       work is associated with increased risk of sexual and physical violence from  
6       clients, domestic partners, or other parties; increased risk of HIV and other  
7       sexually transmitted infections; and a disruption of sex workers’ support  
8       networks, workplace safety, and risk reduction strategies, resulting in reduced  
9       physical and emotional health for sex workers.

10       (e) A 2018 Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health meta-  
11       analysis reviewed over 130 studies conducted over 30 years, synthesizing  
12       evidence on the extent to which sex work laws and policing practices affect sex  
13       workers’ safety, health, and access to services, and the pathways through  
14       which these effects occur. The study concluded “the qualitative and  
15       quantitative evidence demonstrate the extensive harms associated with  
16       criminalization of sex work, including laws and enforcement targeting the sale  
17       and purchase of sex, and activities relating to sex work organization. There is  
18       an urgent need to reform sex-work-related laws and institutional practices so as  
19       to reduce harms and barriers to the realization of health.”

20       (f) It is the intent of the General Assembly to repeal the laws prohibiting  
21       “indiscriminate” sex and voluntary sex work between consenting adults while

1 retaining strict prohibitions and criminal penalties for human trafficking of  
2 persons for sex work.

3 (g)(1) Pursuant to 13 V.S.A. chapter 60, it is illegal to:

4 (A) recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain by any means  
5 a person under 18 years of age for the purpose of having the person engage in a  
6 commercial sex act;

7 (B) recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain any person  
8 through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of having the person engage  
9 in a commercial sex act or compel any person through force, fraud, or coercion  
10 to engage in a commercial sex act; and

11 (C) patronize a person under 18 years of age for a commercial sex act  
12 or patronize any person for a commercial sex act who is being compelled  
13 through force, fraud, or coercion to engage in a commercial sex act.

14 (2) “Coercion” as it applies to compelling a person to engage in a  
15 commercial sex act means:

16 (A) the threat of serious harm, including physical or financial harm to  
17 or physical restraint against any person;

18 (B) any scheme, plan, or pattern intended to cause a person to believe  
19 that failure to perform an act would result in serious bodily or financial harm to  
20 or physical restraint of any person;

1           (C) the abuse or threatened abuse of law or the legal process;

2           (D) withholding, destroying, or confiscating any actual or purported  
3 passport, immigration document, or any other government identification  
4 document of another person;

5           (E) providing a drug, including alcohol, to another person with the  
6 intent to impair the person’s judgment or maintain a state of chemical  
7 dependence;

8           (F) wrongfully taking, obtaining, or withholding any property of  
9 another person;

10          (G) blackmail;

11          (H) asserting control over the finances of another person;

12          (I) debt bondage; or

13          (J) withholding or threatening to withhold food or medication.

14          (h) Penalties for offenses relating to human trafficking range from a  
15 maximum of five years imprisonment (facilitation of human trafficking) to a  
16 mandatory 20 years to life imprisonment (aggravated trafficking).

17        Sec. 2. REPEAL

18          13 V.S.A. chapter 59, subchapter 2 (prostitution) is repealed.

19        Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

20          This act shall take effect on passage.