

Ryann Whitaker, Housing Coordinator for Victims of Exploitation at LIFT
Written Testimony In Support of LDs 1435 and 1436

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on this important bill. My name is Ryann Whitaker and I live in Worcester, MA. I work as a Housing Coordinator for Victims of Exploitation at Living in Freedom Together, a non-profit organization committed to ending the sex trade. I am writing today to ask you to support LDs [1435](#) *An Act to Reduce Commercial Sexual Exploitation and* [1436](#) *An Act to Provide Remedies for Survivors of Commercial Sexual Exploitation*.

While I am not a Maine resident, legislation like this matters to me and the population I serve. I am a mother, a woman in recovery from substance use disorder, and survivor of the sex trade. When I first tried to leave the oversight of my exploiter, I was threatened with a gun. I was told I would be shot to death. This certainly was not the first, nor the last time I experienced violence within that system. After fleeing the state, I was one of the fortunate few who was able to access services to support my journey out of homelessness, active substance use, and commercial sexual exploitation. More than five years after exiting the life of prostitution, I continue to work on unraveling the trauma and PTSD that comes with having been prostituted.

I have experienced and witnessed the egregious violence we survivors are exposed to while within the systems of prostitution. Survivors are often faced with long-term effects from PTSD, substance used disorder, and complex mental health challenges due to the negative impacts of the sex trade. Not only will this bill support survivors in need but this may also help shift the perspective of the community by using more survivor centered language. Survivors should not be looked on as criminals but as people who need community support and exit services. My hope is that one day my daughter will live in a world where it is no longer normalized to purchase access to another human being.

I urge you to please vote “ought to pass” on LDs 1435 and 1436. Thank you for your time.