



**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 Alex Powell (zie/zhir), and I live in Marlborough, MA. 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** for Survivors in Maine and throughout the country.

While I do not live in Maine, I do have family in Maine, and this legislation is an issue that is very important to me. I am nonbinary, a Survivor of the sex trade, a person in long-term recovery, and the Coordinator of Youth Services at Living in Freedom Together, a nonprofit in Worcester, MA that provides direct services to survivors and is working to end the sex trade.

This bill will protect survivors by decriminalizing the act of being bought and sold (thus decriminalizing Survivors) and by shifting the language used to Survivor-centered language. Language is incredibly important and influences how we view issues, and shifting to Survivor-centered language can shift community perspective. Survivors are often dehumanized and seen as ‘other’ and ‘immoral’ in their larger communities. The bill also supports survivors by initiating a legal protocol for response to suspected exploitation and trafficking and by holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

The reality is most adult Survivors are forced into the sex trade at a young age, whether by a trafficker, homelessness, poverty, or substance use disorder. Because of this, many Survivors do not have access to important resources to meet basic needs and build skills for independent living, which thus sets us up for further victimization. For some Survivors, by the time we hit 18, we may have spent years of our life already in the sex trade; exiting feels impossible as this is all we’ve known.

The harm of the sex trade impacts and spans multiple generations in families and communities as we are continuously othered and objectified. If arrested, we face barriers for obtaining employment and housing due to our CORI status. This increases vulnerability for revictimization and vulnerability for our children.

Full decriminalization is often pushed under the guise that this is the only means of income for marginalized individuals, specifically transwomen. We should instead be pushing to expand opportunities and access to



basic needs to reduce vulnerabilities. We deserve safe access to communities and real employment, not to be pigeon-holed into violence as our only means of income. BIPOC women and girls and LGBT folx are targeted by exploiters simply due to our identities. As Survivors, we become repeated targets of violence and are often invisible at best in the larger community. Personally, being queer and nonbinary contributed significantly to my entry into the sex trade and delayed exit.

As a Survivor, I have struggled for years with severe complex and chronic PTSD, chronic and debilitating illness resulting from 'the life,' and the loss of normalcy in any human interaction. Substance use disorder, homelessness, and the repeated and violent sex acts take a significant toll on all aspects of our health. Places and people that were once considered 'safe' are no longer. Everyone is a buyer, and if they aren't, they still look like one.

We cannot punish Survivors for what happened to us. We also cannot give a free pass to those who are benefiting from the blatant paid rape of survivors. This is not an industry – it is the commoditization of violence and oppression, and it needs to be abolished. Supporting survivors means supporting the equality model and ending demand for good.

**Please vote “ought to pass” on LDs 1435 and 1436.**

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Heidi Correll'.