

April 11, 2023

Senator Carney, Rep. Moonen, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary: My name is Quinn Gormley, I use she/her pronouns, and though I normally appear before you on behalf of MaineTransNet, I am here today in a personal capacity to speak in opposition to LD 1435.

I first engaged in sex work when I was 14 years old. I was a Freshman in high school, I had just signed up for the Model UN team, and I needed cash to help pay for one of the trips. My parents, however caring and dedicated to my academic success, were working class and not always able to support my ambitions academically. Like many high school students in my situation, I went looking for a job. I mowed lawns, walked dogs, and put in applications with summer camps and Hannaford.

This time in my life also coincided with my outing as a person attracted to men, and as a transgender girl. A sophomore approached me between classes one day and offered me cash in exchange for some "tutoring help" in his truck after class. He offered me \$20 bucks. It took all of ten minutes. Minimum age at that time was \$7.25/ hr.

Word of my talents spread quickly, and by the end of that year I was offering tutoring two or three times a week. I made good money, and more importantly, I preserved my time for academics. The time I freed up not taking on more traditional work throughout my high school career made it possible for me to ace 11 AP Exams, to win the top scores at All State and District Auditions, to play on sports teams, and captain the Model UN team. The money also paid for my hormones long before our state was willing to pay for such things under Mainecare.

I'm not here to convince you all that teenagers engaging in sex work is a good thing. Quite the contrary. No young person should be placed in the economic situation where they have to choose between pursuing success or making ends meet. Such choices are challenges for adulthood. Rather, I want you to understand that my entry into, and decade long experience with sex work didn't stem from some tragic story.

After I graduated high school, the financial benefits of sex work continued in my life. I engaged in escort work and later phone services. My clients included businessmen, clergy, college professors, widowers, and elected officials. This work helped me pay rent. It put food on my table. It bought textbooks, and it augmented the paltry income associated with nonprofit advocacy work. At no point was I without other choices. I could have done other jobs. I could have worked more hours. I could have opted to work in the private sector. But none of those options were as lucrative, or frankly, as enjoyable. Sex work made my life possible.

To imply that I was exploited throughout this is, frankly, offensive. I experienced no greater exploitation than any of us do in an economic system that leaves most of us with two options: work, or starve.

The singular negative experience I had in this work came when I was 20 years old. I lost control of a client. He was new, and drunk, and dirty. And he strangled me and raped me in the back of a van following a fundraising event. It was February, and he shoved me out of the van and left me on the side of the road in this dress. Instead of calling 911, and getting help, or medical attention, I hitchhiked my way home, 50 miles away. I didn't think I could report my assault because I was afraid I would be charged, and that my reputation with my clients would be ruined. Connecting and trust with clients is important. It's vital for success in the business, and success allows us to be choosy about new clients, which keeps us safer.

Neither sex workers or trafficking victims are kept safe by the criminalization of our labor, or the purchase of that labor. On the contrary, multiple studies have found a strong association between the criminalization of both sides of the equation with violence against sex workers, who are disproportionately women, queer and trans, and of color. We need clear channels to get help when we need it, but those can't exist without the complete decriminalization of this work.

I urge you to vote ought not to pass on LD 1435.

Thank you,

Quinn Gormley