

Partial Decriminalization Op-ed by Maine State Representative Lois Galgay Reckitt, Massachusetts State Representative Mary S. Keefe and New York State Senator Liz Krueger:

When Jasmine Grace was a little girl growing up in Revere, Mass., she loved playing outside, going to the beach, and attending dance class. At the age of 19 she was manipulated, groomed, and coerced into prostitution by a man who played the role of her boyfriend.

He knew her intimately, and he knew how to exploit her vulnerabilities. She was trafficked from her home state of Maine to a brothel in Connecticut, where sex buyers were known to become violent. She endured 15-hour days in filthy conditions until her exploiter prostituted her at the Danish Health Club in Maine, a higher-class brothel where the tips were better and where he could charge sex buyers more.

April marks both Sexual Assault Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month. And accounts of survivors like Jasmine Grace paint a grim picture of a trafficking pipeline operating throughout the Northeast, feeding an insatiable demand from sex buyers and the billion-dollar industry that profits by serving up vulnerable people to meet that demand.

Traffickers prey on vulnerable people. They transport victims across state lines to isolate them and prevent escape, break them with violence and fear to force compliance, and coerce them into prostitution. Once they're in, victims face a litany of barriers that make it extremely difficult for them to escape the sex trade, and there is limited support or services available to help them. In a 2008 study that interviewed 854 people currently or recently in prostitution, 89% said they wanted to exit the sex trade, but were unable due to lack of other survival options.

Our current policy approach — criminalization — fails to address the needs of people who, whether through trafficking, coercion, manipulation, or economic desperation, have been forced into the sex trade. People in prostitution are treated as criminals rather than as traumatized victims in need of critical support and services.

As state legislators representing districts in Maine, Massachusetts, and New York, we believe it is the job of government to aid and protect vulnerable and marginalized people against the systems of exploitation that seek to harm and take advantage of them. That is why we support a policy of partial decriminalization, also known as the Equality Model or the Nordic Model.

The Equality Model decriminalizes people in prostitution and related offenses, while continuing to hold exploiters — sex buyers, pimps, and traffickers — accountable for the harms they cause. It focuses on

supporting and empowering people in and survivors of prostitution by ensuring access to trauma-informed services, empowering them to exit the sex trade and opening the door to a life free from sexual exploitation and commodification. At the same time, by maintaining penalties for exploiters, it decreases demand for sexual services, leads to reduction in trafficking of minors and adults, and shrinks the sex trade.

There are some advocates who call for a policy of full decriminalization and de-regulation of the sex trade, which would include decriminalization of sex buyers, pimps, and brothel owners. This model has been found to cause increased demand for sexual services and the human trafficking that feeds that demand, as well as growth of the sex trade.

To see an example of full decriminalization in practice, we need look no further than Rhode Island, where, from 1980 to 2009, indoor prostitution was inadvertently decriminalized. The result was growth in sex businesses and sex tourism, as well as increased sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking of children and adults. There were also notable occurrences of violent crimes, such as assault and murder, that were linked to indoor decriminalization and committed by local and international organized crime networks.

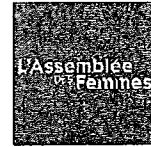
It is a sad and preventable reality that some individuals face such limited options in our society that entering the sex trade seems their only means of survival. This is a policy failure that must be addressed — but the answer is not to offer the sex trade as an alternative social safety net. We unequivocally reject that model. Fundamentally, commodification, the selling, buying, renting, and exploiting of people in prostitution — primarily cis-gendered and trans women and girls — is antithetical to gender equality and a just society.

We need policies in place to keep prostituted people out of the criminal justice system, give them the help and services they need to make empowered choices for themselves, and hold accountable the people who exploit them for profit and sexual gratification. That is what the Equality Model does.

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Fondation Scelles
Connaître, Comprendre, Combattre
l'Exploitation Sexuelle



7 years of the prostitution law: the State must fully commit to equality and justice

TO BE RELEASED: April 13, 2023, 7th anniversary of passage

In 2016, France made the necessary choice to put an end to the male violence that is prostitution. To this end, a just and courageous law was adopted, establishing the decriminalisation of prostituted persons (80% of whom are women and 90% of whom are of foreign origin), the creation of exit programmes from prostitution, prevention actions, and a ban on the purchase of sexual acts (99% of which are committed by men). The law, that aims at strengthening the fight against the prostitution system and to support prostituted persons, includes measures to better protect the victims of this violent system and to tackle the demand for the purchase of sexual acts, without which prostitution and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation would not exist.

In 2017, the #MeToo movement reinforced our society's understanding that there can be no equality between women and men and no true sexual freedom as long as men continue to inflict sexist and sexual violence on women and girls.

Prostitution in all its forms, including filmed, is violence of the most extreme kind. Sexist, racist, flourishing on poverty and intra-family violence, it is at the intersection of all oppressions. The numerous testimonies of survivors of prostitution demonstrate that there is no freedom or real consent when the sexual act is imposed by money.

In seven years, the law has had significant effects:

- * No prostituted person has been convicted (compared to 2,000 per year before the law).
- * As of 1 January 2023, 643 people have benefited from an exit programme. Of the people supported by the associations in the FACT-S group, 87.5% have found stable employment.
- * The number of criminal investigations related to pimping and trafficking increased by 54% in the first three years of the law's implementation.
- * Almost 2.35 million euros confiscated from pimps have been reinvested in the protection and rehabilitation of victims of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation
- * Society has become aware of the extent of child and youth prostitution, amplified by modern technological tools.

All these important progresses have taken place despite a timid commitment of the State in the implementation of the law. In the public debate, the normalisation of prostitution is increasing. The absence of a strong voice expressed by the State on the subject leaves room for an ultra-liberal current which asserts within institutions, the press and the social movement, the idea that "sex"

could be a work like any other. A lot of content on social networks highlights the supposedly easy money and professional fulfilment that this activity would bring.

In order to fulfil the ambition of our public policy, real political support and resources which match the challenge must be committed to allow:

- * The deployment of at least 4000 exit programmes each year;
- * An increased fight against pimping;
- * The application of the sanctions established by law against men who buy sexual acts from women and children;
- * An end to the State's tolerance towards illegal local decrees penalising prostituted persons;
- * Training for professionals, especially those who take complaints from victims, who are still not well received by the police;
- * The introduction of real education on sexuality free from violence;
- * The strengthening of France's abolitionist diplomacy on the European and international scene.

Once again, we say loud and clear: a society cannot claim to achieve real equality between women and men when the latter, who account for almost all purchasers of sexual acts, are educated in the knowledge that they will one day be able to impose a sexual act through money.

Seven years after its adoption, our country must double its efforts to ensure that the law is fully implemented with resources that match its ambition: more than ever, the feminist movement supports the abolition of prostitution and asks the State to take its responsibilities by deploying resources that will guarantee its effective implementation for all.

We ask for resources that match the ambitions expressed. We ask for sufficient means to support the victims.

We demand justice, equality and dignity for all women and girls.