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Testimony on LD 1592 - An Act To Decriminalize Engaging in Prostitution, Strengthen the Laws against Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Allow a Person Convicted of Engaging in Prostitution To Petition the Court To Expunge the Record of Conviction

Dearest Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Elizabeth Conley-Lepene. I hold a Bachelors Degree in Justice, with minors in both Advocacy and Psychology and have Founded a Nonprofit in the state of Maine, called Safe House, we are currently working on its National recognition. I come forward to voice

that I am **NOT IN SUPPORT**: “ LD1592 - An Act To Decriminalize Engaging in Prostitution, Strengthen the Laws against Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Allow a Person Convicted of Engaging in Prostitution To Petition the Court To Expunge the Record of Conviction”. I want to thank you for taking your time to read my testimony in length and consider my concerns when making your decision.

I find it extremely difficult to read this bill, while there are certain aspects that I would lean to acknowledge a bit of support, I cannot help but wonder how this is the direction we are moving here. I just submitted testimony in support of LD 1486: An Act To Improve Investigations of Child Sexual Abuse, and wish this bill was heading in a similar direction.

It is difficult enough to get charges for sex crimes without a dismissal or an intense intimidation, throughout the entire process. The process of reporting a crime is exhausting and the revictimization that occurs happens relentlessly. When it comes to sex crimes, I can reference cases that come to my mind that make me wonder why we are working to tread this serious threat to constituents, backwards.

Megan Waterman, from Scarborough, Maine was murdered ten years ago. When I read this bill, I think, what would Megan say? It's important to note that Megan, didn't just choose to become a prostitute, her life brought here there. When she tried to get out of the situation, she was unable to escape, and was murdered.

People throughout Megan's life would explain her in different ways. The Megan I knew, was fearless, empowered, beautiful, tenacious, radiant, comical and loyal.

When I was a kid, I was bullied, a little bit. Reasoning, I am not quite sure. I remember coming home from my father's house, I had several calls on the caller I.D. (yes, I said that). I had a lot of messages from local kids, asking me to come "hang out". As I was getting through the calls, a call came in from Megan. She said, "DO NOT GO DOWN THERE, you're going to get jumped". In all honesty, she had always played the brave role, and I, always admired it. That day I said, "no, they wouldn't do that, I am going to head down". It felt amazing to take the role of the brave one, this time. After a minute of quibble, we hung up and I set out to the playground. To my "surprise", I was ambushed. I was going to be jumped by a few girls from the neighboring town, set up by a couple of "good friends". I stood my ground, fearless, brave, I put my arms out and said, "go ahead".

Megan, was an amazing friend, she protected me that day. There is absolutely no way, I could ever replace her. We went separate directions, different interests or paths if you will, but she will *ALWAYS* be a sister.

I tell you that story because, I *know*, that if she knew where prostitution would have led her, she would **NOT** have engaged in it **at all**. We have the ability to utilize the past to make the best inferences we can, about the future. These changes that LD1592 bring, would be a liability to our state and to our government, and substantially, would do more harm, than they would good.

We *need* to protect our children from being solicited into prostitution.

I have another story, where a young girl was "asked", solicited if you will, over and over by an old man, and nothing was done. I can tell you that she didn't feel safe, she had to move, and then, she was bullied. She was distraught, a straight A student, to straight Fs, and not just because the act, but because she felt our system failed to support, and protect her.

We need to install real deterrence, stop this commercialization of sex and stop trying to normalize prostitution, we will only create more issues, as we cannot handle the ones we have on our plate today.

I would close this testimony by asking that you **DO NOT** support LD 1592 - An Act To Decriminalize Engaging in Prostitution, Strengthen the Laws against Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Allow a Person Convicted of Engaging in Prostitution To Petition the Court To Expunge the Record of Conviction, and instead I pled, that you: increase the sanctions and crimes for those who engage, and prohibit those looking to be expunged from their sex crimes.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Conley-Lepene

Safe House

Founder/President

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