

Statement in support of Bill LD 1592

To the committee of Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Melissa Pierce, and I am a survivor of prostitution and sex trafficking. I am currently a resident of a program with Living in Freedom Together (LIFT). I write this letter to oppose Maine House Bill LD 1592 to fully decriminalize the sex trade in Maine.

I am a survivor who is 40 years old. My first experience with sexual exploitation was at 24 years old. Due to being prostituted by mainly Caucasian business men, I have experienced trauma from this in a way that one could never imagine. I have been raped, abused- physically and sexually, and groomed which has also contributed to years of substance abuse.

I am currently at a LIFT program to confront my trauma and challenges and to most importantly recover. Currently, I will have a year sober as well as a year of not being sexually exploited due to places like the current program that I am in. LIFT has not only helped me with my trauma but helped me to learn how to love myself again. I've been waiting for a long time for a program that helps sexually exploited women to be available. It is so important for funding to be designated to these types of programs. There are many other women like me who could benefit from similar programs that currently will not exist due to lack of funding.

I think the expungement of criminal records of those that have been prostituted is an extremely important step in the right direction. By expunging the records of those who have been sexually exploited, it's giving the opportunity for a fresh start. Allowing House Bill LD 1592 to pass will contribute to more women being sexually exploited/abused and allow the abusers to get away with it. The decriminalization of prostitution should focus solely on those who have been exploited. If we don't hold those who are pimps, abusers and buyers accountable, we are contributing to the continuing if not increased violence and trafficking as a whole.

I am grateful to be able to speak around my experience and hopeful that my story will be considered when making decisions that affect women like me.

Melissa Pierce

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