

Testimony on 1592, Maine, May 12, 2021

My name is Pansy Watson, and I am an attorney at the National center on sexual exploitation in Washington DC.

We are here to support the state of Maine in proposing this landmark bill. 1592 accurately reframes prostitution as a buyer problem. Rather than just remove prostitution laws from the books, it puts the onus on sex buyers, redefines them as commercial sexual exploiters, moves patronizing to the section of laws on sexual assault, and increases penalties for exploiting minors. These are exactly the kinds of approaches that have led to substantial positive changes in other states that implement them.

Last year I reviewed state laws on prostitution and found those that addressed the demand side and offered comprehensive services had the most effective results in reducing prostitution, including the nuisance level crimes often associated with it, as well as the more severe crime of trafficking that always stems from it.

States that target buyers increase neighborhood safety, and law enforcement report feeling good about getting to focus on the real bad guys.

All prostitution exists because of demand and **all** sex trafficking exists on the prostitution market. Demand must be targeted in order to curb exploitation.

By redefining buyers as commercial sexual exploiters and placing the crime of engaging a prostitute in sexual assault laws, Maine is making it clear that **consent cannot be bought**, and that human beings are not commodities. No one should be legally entitled to buy another's body. This is a cutting-edge approach that would make Maine an innovator and a leader.

By creating a pilot program with comprehensive services for those who seek to exit the life, or mitigate the harm they are subject to, Maine recognizes that the decision to prostitute is often made when there are no other choices. Providing these services creates real choice and real opportunity. And in many states, it is fines assessed against the buyer that funds these programs, making buyers truly accountable for the harm they cause and easing the burden on the state.

Importantly, this bill creates a means by which a prostituted person may expunge and seal their records so that they can pursue housing, work, and live their life free of the stigma of criminal records that do not reflect who they truly are.

To conclude, demand reduction along with the exit and expungement services outlined in 1592 are the most effective ways to mitigate prostitution and trafficking. Passage of this bill would help make Maine a place where no one is exploited and would put Maine on the map as a leader in prostitution reform.

Thank you

