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Organization: Boston Sex Workers & Allies Collective

Topic: LD 2168: An Act to Increase Accountability for Persons Engaged in Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking and to Support Victims

February 2nd, 2026

Dear members of the Maine Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sarah Bazarian, and I am a resident of Somerville and active member of the Boston Sex Workers & Allies Collective.

I am testifying in opposition to LD 2168: An Act to Increase Accountability for Persons Engaged in Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking to Support Victims. By relying on buyer-focused financial penalties, the act would make sex workers who are already precarious more prone to harassment by pushing their activities underground, causing increased isolation and reduced reporting of violent clients. In addition to depreciating working conditions, the act collapses consensual adult sex work and crimes against minors, two distinct categories that require radically different policy approaches. Instead of passing this act, the Main Judiciary Committee should evaluate the current condition of sex work under the compromise-based legal framework that has been enacted in the state before adding additional stipulations.

As a sex worker ally, I worry about the potential repercussions that penalizing clients will have on people who rely on selling sex to gain essential resources, particularly street-based and unhoused sex workers. Already highly stigmatized, sex workers face numerous obstacles to carrying out their work for fear of being reported by people who are against their profession. If Maine were to pass an act that penalizes clients, sex workers might feel pressured to take dangerous clients (because safe clients have been deterred by penalties), tipping the power dynamic to buyers of sex rather than sellers of services. By misunderstanding potential solutions to the power relation at play in the sex worker-client relation—an imbalance primarily due to one's access to vital resources based on their financial position—LD 2168 would harm sex workers far more than it would help.

In fact, increasing penalties for clients does little to address the systemic issues that render sex work a vulnerable profession. Contrary to popular belief, the dangers of sex work do not primarily stem from clients whom they consensually offer services to. Rather, more routine injustices that all gigging workers under capitalism face—including lack of adequate labor protections and absence of comprehensive benefits—make sex workers vulnerable. With the added threat of criminalization from the state, sex workers are often excluded from larger labor rights conversations that could greatly improve their lives. It is these issues we must address—rather than focusing on increasing penalties for clients—if we want to improve quality of life for sex workers.

I urge the Maine Judiciary Committee to oppose LD 2168 for the reasons I outlined above. Instead, for those committee members concerned about the safety and well-being of consenting adult sex workers in Maine, I encourage you to support initiatives that would enhance the lives of sex workers, including allocating funds to support the resources they need, opposing arrest for selling sex, making it easier to report violent or abusive clients, and evaluating the effectiveness of the legal framework currently active in Maine. Centering these needs is the first step to ensuring that those engaged in consensual adult sex work can live their lives with the dignity they deserve.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sarah Bazarian