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MANAGED ALCOHOL PROGRAM

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SJSOWC Calls for the Immediate Repeal of Federal Sex Work Legislation

St. John's, NL, 3 March 2022.

Annually, March 3rd is recognized as Sex Worker's Rights Day, and the St. John's Status of Women Council (SJSOWC) are celebrating by continuing to call for the full decriminalization of sex work.

The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA), federal legislation criminalizing sex work, is currently under parliamentary review. Alongside member groups of the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, the SJSOWC supports and has written the federal government to support a full repeal of PCEPA, because criminalization of sex work actively endangers sex workers and infringes on sex worker's human rights.

The Safe Harbour Outreach Project (SHOP), a program of the SJSOWC, has been advocating for sex workers and survivors rights in St. John's and across the province. Susan Smith, Project Coordinator with the Safe Harbour Outreach Project (SHOP) notes,

"PCEPA claims to end the exploitation of women, but it really creates unsafe working conditions. It makes it difficult for sex workers to screen clients and pushes them into more isolated areas of our city, increasing their vulnerability to violence. Our team worked to write a brief, explaining to leaders in the House of Commons the harm that is resulting from this law."

Sex workers note that this law puts them in conflict with police and it makes them less ready to report when they do face violence or threats in their work. SHOP undertook community consultations between 2017-2022, speaking with sex workers and survivors about about the harms of PCEPA. One local sex worker notes:

"Since the introduction of [PCEPA] I feel less safe as an individual within the industry. We have had to change the way we advertise our work. We are now forced to advertise (if we do at all) by using sketchy websites that put everyone at risk. The providers and consumers aren't going anywhere - they have all moved underground to connect. We need to be allowed to advertise in print and online media without fear of arrest of the third parties that run it. We need government to acknowledge that sex work is real work."

Another sex worker in St. John's shares about their interactions with police and the real life impacts of criminalization under PCEPA:

“This doesn’t make us feel safe. This doesn’t help. We already can’t trust the police. You’re cutting us off from even more places we’re supposed to be able to turn. You’re threatening us – we take this as a threat.”

The SJSOWC, along with other groups that advocate for sex work law reform across the country, are calling for a full repeal of PCEPA, the decriminalization of sex work in Canada, and working to ensure sex workers voices are centered in any legislative reform.

The next meeting of the House of Commons on PCEPA will take place on Friday, 4 March at 2:30 PM local time and can [be viewed by any member of the public](#). The SJSOWC also encourages citizens to call or write their Member of Parliament to share concerns about the PCEPA review and the safety of sex workers in our community.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information about the PCEPA Review:

<http://sexworklawreform.com/infosheets-impacts-of-c-36/>

Attachment: PCEPA Backgrounder

CONTACT INFORMATION

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BACKGROUND

The St. John's Status of Women Council (hereafter SJSOWC) is a feminist organization that since 1972 is continually working to achieve equality and justice through political activism, community collaboration and the creation of a safe and inclusive space for all women and non-binary people in the St. John's area, in Newfoundland and Labrador. The SJSOWC operates the province's first and only sex worker advocacy program: the Safe Harbour Outreach Project (hereafter SHOP). Since its inception in 2013, SHOP's mandate is to advocate for the human rights of all women and non-binary people who have engaged in sex work across our city and province, both on an individual and collective level. Serving people for whom sex work is an occupation, and also people who have experienced exploitation and/or violence, both within and outside of the sex industry. We support everyone who identifies as a current or former sex worker, regardless of industry sector area. This means that we offer support to dancers, street level workers, in and out call workers, webcam workers, phone workers, independent escorts, those who work in porn, massage parlours, and more.

Our Position

Alongside member groups of the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, the SJSOWC supports a full repeal of PCEPA, because the evidence, which is validated by our frontline experience and set out in more detail below, demonstrates that:

- Criminalizing clients does not decrease demand for sex work, but rather pushes sex work into less populated areas of the city, in unsafe areas and working conditions, while decreasing their ability to undertake proper client screening.
- Criminalizing the advertising of sex workers' services creates significant barriers to working indoors and creates barriers to both the screening of clients as well as planning for meetings in more secure areas.
- Criminalizing third parties, including drivers, security personnel, administrators, or owners of establishments that support sex workers in their work isolates sex workers and creates risk for them in building a safe work environment.

Short of repeal, any proposed legislative change must be informed and directed by apertaining to sex work in Canada must include direction from diverse groups of current and former sex workers, who hold expertise in terms of access to protections from their lived experience. I

2. Key Considerations

Prohibiting the Purchasing of Sex Workers Services

Sex workers and ally experts [have clearly demonstrated the harms](#) of criminalizing the purchasing of sexual services under PCEPA. When clients are displaced or deterred, sex workers are forced to move to darker or less populated areas, with less access to peer support, community or emergency services, leaving them vulnerable to violence and unsafe working conditions. A reduced client base necessitates longer working hours and taking greater risks in order to ensure they have adequate income. Above all, increased police presence often encourages sex workers to move to places that are less populated, increasing vulnerabilities. Finally, when clients fear detection by police, they may be reluctant to give sex workers the time needed for proper screening and safety measures. Criminalizing the purchase of sex does not

decrease the demand. Rather, it pushes sex workers into the shadows, creating vulnerable environments and increasing risks of gender-based and state violence.

Prohibiting the Advertising of Sex Workers Services

Through advertising, sex workers create opportunities for indoor work – which increases their ability to conduct safety planning, utilize support staff to ensure that precautions are met, and conduct thorough screening to make informed decisions about clients. While sex workers are exempt from prosecution for advertising their own sexual services, any party that is linked to that advertising – whether it be a newspaper, magazine, website, or internet service provider – could face prosecution. The practical effect of this law is to prevent sex workers from being able to advertise, as a platform is needed to facilitate advertising. Removing access to reliable and secure advertisement platforms hinders the capacity of sex workers to maintain workplace safety and informed consent.

Prohibiting Materially Benefitting from Sexual Services

Sex workers often rely on support staff to ensure their safety and quality of work life. This can include receptionists, security, business owners, drivers, cleaning staff, and more. Each of these staff members ensure that sex workers can work in an environment that ensures their security and workplace safety. Under PCEPA, people working in these positions are criminalized. Concerns about exploitation of people in the adult sex industry, are fully and adequately addressed in other pieces of existing Canadian legislation, meaning PCEPA is redundant and unnecessary.