

The logo for Decriminalize Sex Work is a dark red square containing the text "Decriminalize Sex Work" in a white, handwritten-style font. A small white heart is positioned at the end of the word "Work".

Decriminalize
Sex Work ♡

END HUMAN TRAFFICKING.
PROMOTE HEALTH & SAFETY.

www.DecriminalizeSex.Work

Decriminalizing Sex Work Is Part of Reducing Police Brutality

**Anti-prostitution laws are often used to target poor people of color.
This often leads to arrest, incarceration, and trauma, rather than assistance or support.**

NEW YORK, NY – June 19 – The conflation of sex work and trafficking has led to a dramatic increase in funding for law-enforcement departments. As a result, law-enforcement officers raid and arrest adult consensual sex workers and their clients, often in the name of rescuing and saving sex-trafficking victims. These policies and priorities have done little to help victims of trafficking or violence. Decriminalizing sex work is one way to redirect resources from law enforcement to the social services that communities want.

“Instead of help, these people are getting put in jail”, explains Ceyenne Doroshow, founder and executive director of GLITS ([Gays and Lesbians Living in a Transgender Society](#)) and community engagement consultant for Decriminalize Sex Work. “In the arrest, you are taking away the autonomy of a Black, trans sex worker.” Ceyenne continues, “You are taking away their equity, their mental stability. You are breaking what was already broken because of society and policing. Recidivism is because of the trauma they face in prison and in arrest. And if I had my way, I would go after the police union as they keep excusing bad behavior.”

Laws such as loitering for the purpose of engaging in a prostitution offense give police the pretext to engage and arrest marginalized women. For example, in New York City in 2018, there were 139 people arrested for loitering for the purposes of prostitution, 95% of them persons of color, and a disproportionate amount of them transwomen. That same year more than [500 people were arrested for prostitution](#) in NYC, the overwhelming majority of whom are women and transwomen of color.

Too often, police abuse their power and sexually assault their targets, like the case of West Sacramento, California [police officer Sergio Alvarez, who raped several sex workers](#). In 2018, an undercover Columbus, Ohio police officer [shot and killed 23-year-old sex worker Donna Dalton](#) (a.k.a. Donna Castleberry) in an unmarked police car. In 2017, [Yang Song leaped to her death to avoid arrest by NYC vice](#) raiding the massage parlor where she worked.

Tens of thousands of people are [arrested annually for prostitution and related crimes](#). The majority of those arrested are [adults who engage in consensual, victimless activities](#). Where sex work is [decriminalized](#), law enforcement is able to focus resources on prosecuting human trafficking and other violent crimes.

“Those who are arrested for selling sex face police abuse or harassment, potential incarceration, fines, lost wages, and significant collateral consequences. They often end up with permanent records that hinder future opportunities for employment, housing, immigration status, and other necessities,” says DSW Legal Director Melissa Broudo. “Criminalizing sex work makes it dangerous. Police, prosecutors and jails don’t improve the lives of people who are arrested for trying to earn a living.”

DSW Communications Director Kaytlin Bailey says, “The police have never served the community of sex workers. Now that the nation is finally taking police brutality and institutional racism seriously, it’s time to redirect funds wasted on policing adult sex workers to helping people who struggle. It’s time to stop the arrests.”

Decriminalize Sex Work

Decriminalize Sex Work is a national organization pursuing a state-by-state strategy to end the prohibition of consensual, adult prostitution in the United States. We work with local organizations, advocates, and lobbyists to build community support and convince legislators to stop prostitution-related arrests. Evidence shows that decriminalizing sex work will help end human trafficking, improve public health, and promote community safety.

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Addendum:

Why Decriminalizing Sex Work Is Good Criminal Justice Policy.

Too many people are incarcerated in the United States, and scarce resources are spent targeting victimless crimes. Tens of thousands of people are arrested annually for prostitution and related crimes.¹ The majority of those arrested are adults who engage in consensual, victimless activities.² Where sex work is decriminalized, law enforcement is able to focus resources on prosecuting human trafficking and other violent crimes.³

Those who are arrested and jailed for buying or selling sex face incarceration, fines, parole, and probation. They are likely to end up with permanent records that hinder future opportunities for employment, housing, and other necessities.⁴

Tough-on-crime policies lead to mass incarceration. Decades of tough-on-crime policies overcrowded American prisons with nonviolent offenders. The devastating consequences of the War on Drugs has prompted reform.⁵ It is time for laws criminalizing and marginalizing sex workers to see the same shift.

Save taxpayer money. Arresting people for consensual activities along with all of the additional costs after the arrest – jail, prosecution, probation, etc. – pose a significant burden to taxpayers.⁶ Yet, the criminalization of prostitution neither ends nor reduces it⁷; it solely pushes sex work into the underground market, where workers are unprotected from exploitation and abuse.

We know what prohibition does to markets. Alcohol prohibition failed to reduce demand and made alcohol more dangerous. The prohibition of drugs did the same. Laws have adapted to address these realities, replacing criminalization with harm-reduction policies. Combatting violence and abuse in sex work should be prioritized over arresting consensual adults.

Criminalizing sex work only amplifies the harms associated with it. Police, prosecutors and jails are ill-equipped to improve the lives of people who are arrested for trying to earn a living via prostitution.

Too often police abuse their powers and exploit or rape sex workers.⁸ Sex workers engaging in prostitution who are harmed by police officers have nowhere to turn for help. Decriminalization would empower sex workers and substantially reduce this abuse of power.

¹The most recent FBI data from 2018 reported 24,944 arrests for “Prostitution and Commercialized Vice” <https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/>.

²“Should Prostitution be a crime?” Emily Bazelon. May 5, 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/should-prostitution-be-a-crime.html>

³“Decriminalising sex work in New Zealand: its history and impact.” Fraser Crichton. August 2015. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/decriminalising-sex-work-in-new-zealand-its-history-and-impact/>

⁴“Consequences of Policing Prostitution?” Dank, Yahner, & Yu. April 2017. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89451/legal_aid_final_0.pdf

⁵“Public opinion favors criminal justice and drug policy reform, making now the time to act.” Legal Action Center. <https://lac.org/public-opinion-favors-criminal-justice-and-drug-policy-reform-making-now-the-time-to-act/>

⁶“No Price Too High: Victimless Crimes and the Ninth Amendment” Charles Fyffe, Robert M. Hardaway. 2003.

⁷Department of Justice Assessment of Review of Operation of Article 64A of the Sexual Offences Order (Northern Ireland) 2008: Offence of Purchasing Sexual Services. <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/assessment-of-impact-criminalisation-of-purchasing-sexual-services.pdf>

⁸ “Arrest the Violence: Human Rights Violations Against Sex Workers in 11 Countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia” December 17, 2009. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/arrest-violence-human-rights-violations-against-sex-workers-11-countries-central-and-eastern>