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## Rex Heuermann Sentencing Highlights Need To End Criminalization That Makes Sex Workers More Vulnerable to Violence

NEW YORK, NY (June 17, 2026) – As Rex Heuermann is sentenced for the murders of eight women whose remains were discovered near Gilgo Beach in New York, Decriminalize Sex Work (DSW) urges policymakers to confront the systemic failures that left the victims vulnerable and [hindered efforts](#) to identify the perpetrator. Several of Heuermann's victims reportedly engaged in sex work. [Criminalization and stigma](#) push sex workers into dangerous conditions, make it harder to report violence, and create barriers to seeking help.

“Today is about accountability for one perpetrator and it also has to be about accountability for the systems that made the victims vulnerable,” said Ariela Moscovitz, communications director at DSW. “The victims in this case deserved safety, dignity, and protection long before their murders. Instead, they lived in a society that often treats people engaged in sex work as disposable.”

Criminalization makes it more difficult to report violence and identify dangerous offenders. [Safe reporting laws](#) for sex workers who report crimes as victims or witnesses remain an important public safety measure. When people fear arrest for prostitution-related offenses, they may be less likely to report violence, suspicious activity, or information that could assist an investigation.

“Sex workers who experience violence or witness crimes should be able to seek help without fearing arrest themselves,” DSW Legal Director Melissa Broudo said. “No one should have to choose between their own safety and cooperating with law enforcement. Strong immunity protections save lives, but ultimately decriminalization is what allows people to access safety, report harm, and exercise the same rights as anyone else.”

[Research](#) and the lived experiences of sex workers consistently demonstrate that criminalization drives the industry further underground, making it harder for workers to screen clients, share safety information, access services, and seek assistance when they experience violence.

Every person deserves protection, regardless of how they earn a living. Real safety comes from ensuring that people can report violence, seek help, and live free from criminalization and stigma.

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**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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