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Maine Enacts Prostitution Law Decried by Leading Trafficking and Human Rights Experts

AUGUSTA, ME (June 26, 2023) – Today Governor Janet Mills signed into law a bill, sponsored by Representative Lois Reckitt, that makes it legal for adults to sell sexual services but illegal for adults to buy sexual services. Maine is now the first and only state to enact the policy model referred to as the Nordic model, the Entrapment model, or the [End Demand](#) model. Lawmakers market this legislation as a means of curtailing prostitution and combating trafficking, while evidence from around the world shows it does neither. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UNAIDS, the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, the World Health Organization, and many other human rights groups have denounced the Entrapment model because because countries that have implemented it continue to see violence and exploitation in commercial sex proliferate.

The criminalization of buying and/or selling sex makes sex workers vulnerable to predators. Due to fear of arrest, people are hesitant to provide the information sex workers need to effectively screen individuals and separate predators from actual clients. Because criminalizing clients pushes the entire industry further underground, sex workers are more dependent on potentially exploitative third parties to help clients avoid discovery in order to keep their business, even if this risks exploitation. Sweden and Northern Ireland implemented Entrapment Model laws in 1999 and 2015, respectively. In both places, prostitution persists. [A study](#) released in Sweden in 2019 reports the unambiguous failure of the Entrapment Model to reduce demand for prostitution, to deter people from engaging in sex work, or to provide meaningful resources to victims of human trafficking in or out of the sex industry.

Proponents of this legislation claim that consensual adult sex work is inherently exploitative which is untrue. Enacting this legislation not only shows disregard for ample and unequivocal evidence, it also codifies the dangerous notion that adults do not have bodily autonomy and cannot consent to paid sex. “Lots of supporters of Entrapment model legislation are feminists

who support bodily autonomy as it relates to abortion but do not think people should have that same right to bodily autonomy should they choose to engage in sex work,” said Rebecca Cleary, a staff attorney at Decriminalize Sex Work (DSW). “Entrapment Model laws are misguided and misinformed, driven by harmful and stigmatizing ideology and the false promise that they will abolish the sex industry. Enacting this law will cause real harm to Maine’s most marginalized individuals. We will monitor the effects of the law closely to mitigate harm and ensure that no other states follow Maine’s unprecedented decision,” she continued.

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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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