

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned, support the “SESTA and FOSTA Examination of Secondary Effects for Sex Workers Study Act or the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act”, to study the impact of losing access to internet platforms on the health and safety of sex workers. As organizations working across diverse communities, we are committed to meaningfully improving the health, safety and wellness for people who trade sex. Whether a personal choice or a necessity, sex work is work. But systemic discrimination can lead LGBTQ people in particular to sex work. In a 2015 survey of transgender people, 19% reported doing [some type of sex work for food, money, or a place to sleep](#). In a 2011 survey of transgender people, [of those engaged in sex work](#), 69% had experienced a negative job outcome such as being fired or denied a job because of being transgender, nearly half (48%) had experienced homelessness, and nearly a third (31%) lived on less than \$10,000 a year. Transgender people engage in sex work at a rate [ten times](#) that of cisgender women.

Further, criminalization, discrimination by service-providers, and stigma make people who trade sex more vulnerable to violence, victimization and exploitation. [One study of New York sex workers reported that 80%](#) had been victims of violence, including 27% at the hands of police. Twenty-three percent of LGBTQ murder victims on the [2012 Anti-Violence Project report](#) were killed while engaging in sex work. Sex workers report being [extorted and sexually exploited](#) by police officers. Transgender women across the country, particularly transgender women of color, [report police profiling them as sex workers](#) even when they are [engaged in activity](#) such as gathering with friends in a public space or walking down the street.

Many people who trade sex rely on access to internet platforms for safety and security, and to enable harm reduction techniques. Sex workers and direct-service providers anecdotally know that access to internet platforms improves the health and safety of sex workers. [One study](#), currently under peer review, demonstrated a correlation between the creation of online venues for people who trade sex through Craigslist’s adult services section and a drop of 17% of female homicides. However, in the last several years, numerous platforms have either been seized by federal law enforcement such as Rentboy.com, or shut down due to increased and vague criminal and civil liability due to the passage of FOSTA/SESTA. Community organizations and direct-service providers for sex-workers around the world have anecdotally reported a widespread destabilization of sex-worker communities.

The loss of access to internet platforms, the venues through which sex workers have been able to make ends meet, has pushed many sex workers who were previously independent into other street-based work, working for managers, and with third parties. This can lead to a decrease in income, which many sex workers have indeed reported. This has, in turn, led sex workers to work with more clients in order to make up lost income, including those clients who have previously been black-listed for theft and violence.

While sex workers and advocates have widespread anecdotal information about the consequences of losing access to internet platforms, no rigorous study has been conducted to

assess the full impact of the loss of internet platforms for the health and safety of sex workers, who are frequently amongst the most marginalized members of our society.

This bill directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct a study to assess the unintended impacts of losing access to internet platforms on people who trade sex and their communities. As anti-trafficking policies and practices are carried out, policymakers must consider the collateral consequences and ask whether current policies and practices are the most effective way to achieve the important goal of reducing exploitation and trafficking. This study will focus on those who are most impacted by the loss of access to internet platforms, people who have been trading sex both before and after the closure of these platforms, and recognize that these community members should not be made more precarious and vulnerable to violence and exploitation as a result of anti-trafficking policies and law enforcement actions.

In developing anti-trafficking policies, the impact of those policies on people who consensually trade sex is frequently not a consideration. Because many people choose sex work when their options are limited by systemic discrimination, it is important that anti-trafficking policies be designed to avoid further harming or stigmatizing sex workers. Policies and practices must be effective in reaching their intended goal and must weigh the collateral consequences of their enactment. This study would be one of the first rigorous, national study to evaluate the impacts of policies intended to prevent trafficking on people engaged in consensual, transactional sex work. We invite you to support the health and safety of people who trade sex by better understanding the unintended impacts of anti-trafficking policies by being an original co-sponsor of this landmark legislation.

Sincerely,

ABC Atlanta LLC  
Advocates for Youth  
Advocating Opportunity  
AIDS Alabama  
AIDS Foundation of Chicago  
AIDS United  
American Atheists  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Athlete Ally  
Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition  
BiNet USA  
Black and Pink  
Black and Pink, Boston Chapter  
CARES  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
Center for HIV Law and Policy  
Center for Sexual Pleasure and Health

Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School  
Charm City Care Connection  
Collective Action for Safe Spaces  
Counter Narrative Project  
DecrimNY  
Determine Your Destiny  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Equality North Carolina  
Families For Justice As Healing  
FORGE, Inc.  
Free Speech Coalition (FSC)  
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality  
Harm Reduction Coalition  
HIPS  
HIVenas Abiertas: A Network of Latinx People Living with HIV  
Human Rights Campaign  
LaGender Inc  
Lambda Legal  
Massachusetts Bail Fund  
Mazzoni Center  
The Moore-O'Neal Law Group, LLC  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
The National Equality Action Team  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
No Justice No Pride  
Oasis Legal Services  
Peer Wellness & Recovery Services, Inc.  
Positive Women's Network - USA  
Positively Trans  
Promundo-US  
Rad Care  
Red Canary Song  
Reframe Health and Justice  
San Francisco AIDS Foundation  
Sero Project  
Sex Workers Outreach Project, USA  
Sex Workers Outreach Project, Baltimore Chapter  
Sex Workers Outreach Project, Behind Bars  
Sex Workers Outreach Project, Sacramento Chapter  
SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change  
Sister's Unchained  
St. James Infirmary  
Support Ho(s)e

Transcending Barriers  
Transgender Law Center  
Treatment Action Group (TAG)  
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity  
Vera Institute of Justice  
Voices of Hope  
Whitman-Walker Health  
Whose Corner is it Anyway  
Woodhull Freedom Foundation