

## Criminal Code (Decriminalising Sex Work) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

**Submission No:** 108  
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### Submitter Comments:

In general I strongly support the Criminal Code (Decriminalising Sex Work) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Sex workers like myself have worked very hard over many years to have our voices heard to remove the harmful criminal laws that impede our human rights and make our working lives unsafe. We are finally feeling like we have been heard but until this Bill goes through we continue to work in underground workplaces fearful of police charges and fearful to report crimes against us to police. I have experience working in sex work in pre-Fitzgerald times and I know first hand that the current licensing system is worse for sex workers that it was back in the 1980s when police turned a blind eye in return for payoffs from the major operators. Over the years since then I have worked legally and illegally in brothels, escort agencies and privately. I have been involved in sex work organising and I was a co-founder of Respect Inc in 2008. This Bill will decriminalise many existing sex work workplaces, where sex workers are currently working under unsafe conditions, fearful of police entrapment and charges and unable to legally speak out for fairer working conditions. The Bill will allow a safer sex work sector and will give sex workers greater choice over working conditions, compel owners and operators to provide fair working conditions including providing and ensuring the use of safer sex equipment. This Bill will remove the stigmatising laws that compel sex workers to undergo mandatory testing for STIs when the epidemiology shows that sex workers have equal to better sexual health than the general population. Most importantly, sex workers will finally be able to work together in their own collective workplaces, sharing financial expenses and providing each other with physical and emotional support. Peer education is one of the most important mechanisms in the development of sex work skills. Through peer education sex workers learn about safer working practices including safer sex practices. It is through peer education that sex workers were at the forefront of the HIV prevention efforts in the 1980s in Australia. While the Queensland Government funds the local sex worker organisation Respect Inc to provide peer education this does not replace the informal peer education that occurs when sex workers are working together. I am happy that this Bill will also bolster Anti-discrimination protections for sex workers and remove the stigmatising and discriminatory exemptions that has allowed accommodation providers and child-focused industries to discriminate against us. I do not support the recommendations of the QLRC report in one key area. I do not agree that there should be new criminal laws which focus on sex work. I strongly believe and my lived experience has taught me that when one occupation is singled out like sex work has been in the Criminal Code it contributes to the negative stigma around that occupation. People generally believe that if there is a criminal law there must be a good reason for it to exist. I argued in my submission to the QLRC that there were more than enough other criminal laws with harsh penalties to cover the sexual exploitation of young people. I do not believe that additional criminal laws that focus on sex work in this area are needed. A quick overview of the police statistics for the last 25 years shows that there have been very few cases of underage people even being found on premises. Underage sex work is extremely rare and I do believe these additional laws will give police the power they will need to harass sex workers as they are inclined to do. The people who will suffer the continued stigma and trauma of police interference will be the children of sex workers who already have much stigma to negotiate in their lives. My experience is that many police officers are by nature conservative and do not agree with sex work. They will use whatever laws are available to them to intrude into the lives of sex workers, sometimes under the guise of protecting sex workers from those that police feel are exploiting them, such as partners and family members. Any laws that maintain the power of police over sex workers and sex work workplaces will be misused (even under

'good intentions') and should not be entertained. This was argued very strongly and with evidence in the Respect Inc and DecrimQld submission to the QLRC and I stand by it.