

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

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To the QLD Housing, Big Build and Manufacturing Committee,

My name is Katia Schwartz, and I am a Deaf sex worker currently residing on Gadigal Land. I am writing to you today in support of the full repeal of Chapter 22A of the Queensland Criminal Code. I strongly recommend its urgent commencement.

I have worked as a stripper, full service massage/brothel worker and private escort across Australia since 2008. As a touring professional, I have experienced working in states and territories with and without the full decriminalisation of sex work. I support decriminalisation because it is an important step in combating stigma and discrimination and is the only legislative model that acknowledges the autonomy and agency of sex workers. Sex work is real work, and full decriminalisation recognises this.

In 2010, I began my escorting career in Queensland as I toured there frequently for stripping. I was also not 'out' initially, and felt more comfortable trying full service work outside of New South Wales. Although I had plenty of experience working in the sex industry as a stripper, I had never worked in full service sex work before. There are some crossovers between the genres, however specific health and safety information for full service work was not something that was covered in skillshare education with my stripper peers. I worked alone. Working by myself, I realise now that I was unaware of vital industry knowledge that is usually shared among colleagues, such as where to get access to free, anonymous STI/BBV testing, where to buy bulk PPE and how to perform visual sexual health checks on clients. I continued to work in Queensland alone, uneducated, without safety strategies in place and isolated from full service working peers for many years. I was working within the law, in ways that the law in Queensland allows sex workers to work. But it was potentially unsafe, and I was without support mechanisms or safety strategies in place. I thought this was normal, because this was the law in Queensland.

It was not until I worked in decriminalised jurisdictions such as the Northern Territory and New South Wales that I became better educated about health and safety in the sex industry workplace. Peer education from co-workers in collectives provided me with firsthand knowledge and experiences shared by other sex workers who have navigated similar challenges and circumstances. By working with other sex workers, I gained practical advice on safety measures, negotiation skills, accessing resources such as healthcare and legal support, and self care strategies for the emotional and social aspects of the job.

Being able to work with other sex workers and share industry knowledge fosters a sense of community and solidarity. It is important because peer education is such an effective support measure. As such, I support sex workers not having to be forced to work alone, by legislation or Local Council restrictions. There cannot be any barriers put into place that would prevent Queensland sex workers from sharing workspace, skills and safety strategies. For too long sex workers have been forced to choose between working safely or lawfully in Queensland, due to the Criminal Code (22a) and the Prostitution Act. Prohibition by Local Councils cannot be allowed to replace those repealed laws after decriminalisation. I support Part 3 and Part 7 of the Bill, which prevents Local Councils from acting against decriminalisation.

Layering whorephobia with ableism compounds the discrimination I face as a disabled sex worker. I am constantly forced to contend with the judgement and discriminatory policies and actions of individuals, organisations and systems who have power over me, with very little protection.

Ableism and whorephobia impacts my ability to secure employment, both inside and outside of the sex industry with safe working conditions that have enforceable labour protections. Even residing in a state with decriminalisation, I am still often unable to access free, anonymous sexual health testing and I don't have access to deaf and sex worker friendly mental health support. I often face isolation due to the lack of access to broader community information, news and social media. Additionally, securing housing and accessing essential community services are also extremely difficult as a disabled sex worker. Finally, reporting crimes as a deaf or disabled sex worker is astronomically more difficult than for other members of the broader community.

All of my experiences of discrimination are significantly compounded when working in jurisdictions without full decriminalisation of sex work. Decriminalisation and anti discrimination protections for sex workers are vital tools in breaking down stigma and to acknowledge that we are valuable members of the community.

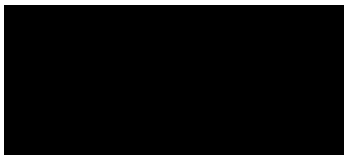
In addition to the current amendments of the bill, as a stripper of 16 years I would also like to recommend that strip club workplaces should be included. There should be a full review of the Adult Entertainment sector to modernise it, and remove police as regulators from strip clubs. Under the current legislation, I have personally experienced oppressive behaviour from police in the Adult Entertainment workplaces. While working in strip clubs, police frequently performed regular 'walkthroughs' and on some occasions, raids. In these raids, police officers often emptied the contents of my bag onto the floor with disregard for my belongings. Lights were turned on, and we weren't allowed access to our clothes. During walkthroughs, we were told by police to stop dancing and stand still and exposed for uncomfortable periods of time. On one occasion, an on-duty police officer handed me his phone number on a piece of paper while I was performing a private dance for a client. In my experience, police as regulators in any area of the sex industry contributes to increased discrimination

and fosters a dangerous imbalance of power. I look forward to Queensland embarking on the review of the Adult Entertainment sector.

The urgent repeal of Chapter 22A of the Queensland Criminal Code is imperative for the safety, autonomy, and well-being of sex workers like myself. My personal journey through various sectors of the industry highlights the critical need for decriminalisation and urgent review of the Adult Entertainment sector. As a Deaf sex worker facing the intersecting oppressions of ableism and whorephobia, the barriers to accessing essential services and protections are profound. Decriminalisation, coupled with anti-discrimination protections, not only acknowledges the value of sex workers but also represents a significant step towards dismantling systemic oppression and ensuring our rights as integral members of society.

I give permission for this submission to be published, unredacted by the committee.

Regards,



Katia Schwartz