

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy regarding Bill 251,
Combating Human Trafficking Act, 2021.

Written Submission by:

Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers' Action Project

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Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project is one of Canada's oldest sex worker justice organizations serving Toronto's downtown east end since 1986. We exist in the heart of our city's housing crisis, serving community living in encampments, our overcrowded shelter system and navigating extreme poverty as well as surveillance + targeted harassment from local law enforcement. We offer weekly drop-in programming, street outreach, harm reduction supplies, education for organizations, non-profits and government looking to engage sex workers as well as social, political and legal advocacy for our community. Our organization and leaders like Monica Forrester launched the nation's first programming for Indigenous sex workers, and we work directly with marginalized groups to provide culturally specific resources and supports to Black and Indigenous communities of colour, non-binary, trans and 2spirit sex workers.

Bill 251 is incredibly detrimental to not only sex workers, but a number of marginalized communities targeted by policing and our broken criminal justice system. Bill 251 deliberately conflates sex work with trafficking, undermining the agency and human rights of sex workers everywhere - our organizations and our communities have noted, for decades, that further criminalizing sex work and conflating our work with trafficking only harms our communities and further marginalizes our people.

The bill itself:

1. **Dramatically expands police powers**, allowing unfettered access to hotels, potentially spaces like airbnb, people's homes and businesses, as well as access to sensitive information on the mere *suspicion* sex work may be taking place, investing hundreds of millions of dollars into the expansion of policing through a number of different avenues - extending into social service sectors and local businesses,
2. **Facilitates greater cooperation between police and other social service sectors**, effectively downloading policing techniques and responsibilities onto social workers themselves (including the ability to detain, seize and remove community members, and force programs on them without consent.

We need to stress here that detention and seizure of community members, regardless of whether it's done by police, social service workers, bylaw enforcement officers, is largely experienced as an assault and betrayal)

3. **Invests in the same discriminatory forms of racial profiling** that have historically led to police, social workers, hotels, even flight crew profiling Black and Indigenous communities, racialized communities, poor and working class communities, queer and trans communities, immigrants and other historically marginalized groups.
4. **Allows law enforcement to target both physical and digital platforms** through the introduction of restrictions, sanctions and fines. Many in our community rely on these platforms that allow sex workers to advertise, screen, and engage in work safely on their own terms. This is an extension of the existing hearings happening at the federal level following right-wing religious groups campaigning for the abolition of sex work.

Maggie's is located in the heart of Toronto's housing crisis, our shelter crisis that finds many spaces overcrowded, underfunded, navigating unmanageable COVID outbreaks. We're in the heart of our city's overdose crisis, and have lost our friends, family and community. We also address you as an organization that has been directly targeted by local police and supported many others in our communities through police violence and abuse for the better part of four decades. Through the pandemic we've seen an uptick in targeted violence and discrimination against sex workers from the police and local bylaw enforcement, including but not limited to officers booking appointments with sex workers, arresting them on arrival and abusing their power by demanding sexual favors and using excessive force. Officers targeting and harassing street-based sex workers with racist and transphobic slurs, openly citing the uneven power dynamics between them. So much so we've had to establish a legal program through the pandemic to meet the sheer volume of complaints from the community. Even political leaders shaming and degrading sex workers in a moment where our industries

have shut down and many of our community members were barred from accessing emergency aid.

Perspectives that strip sex workers of our agency - ranging from perspectives that degrade our work and our worth, to perspectives that cast us as victims, deliberately ignoring movements to fund our oppressors- ultimately cause greater harm to sex workers, undermine our collective struggle for human rights and place us in more precarious positions that law enforcement have been happy to exploit.

One of the most significant threats to sex workers - the greatest source of fear, violence, pain and stress - is the policing and the continued criminalization of our work. When police target sex workers and our organization, we're left to respond to that violence on our own. Choosing to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into services tied to policing and harmful anti-trafficking mandates will only worsen the issues sex workers have raised for the better part of 50 years in Ontario, and continue to invest in an exploitative "rescue industry" that calls for the complete abolition of our work. Our communities have been telling local, provincial and federal levels of government what's needed for a long time: the decriminalization of our work, a meaningful investment in social services and supports, social safety nets, housing, food security, living wages and increases to things like OW and ODSP.

The bill claims to protect victims of trafficking, but we know that expanding police powers and targeting commercial sex work does not support survivors of trafficking, rather it results in the targeted displacement of our communities - particularly queer and trans, Black and Indigenous Communities of Colour. In the midst of a global movement for racial justice that has fundamentally shifted our collective understanding of policing, revealing the ongoing harm local police forces inflict on our communities there is no justification for an additional \$300 million investment meant to expand not only the resources and powers of local police, but extend and download their responsibilities onto social workers, inspectors and even local businesses work. Police do not keep us safe - they cause a great deal of harm, and are the source of so much pain, grief and terror in our communities. To this end, we call on the Ontario government to use the \$300 million earmarked for this bill to meet the material needs of survivors - the current application structure for Anti-Trafficking

Community Support Funds require organizations to have pre-existing relationships and cooperative partnerships between local law enforcement, other anti-trafficking initiatives, and offer largely residential, correctional programming that works with police as a key partner. Organizations like ours doing frontline work, providing drop-in programming, street outreach, harm reduction programs do not qualify for these vast resources because **organizations that do not run predatory exit programs are excluded from these funded opportunities.** Sex workers, survivors and our community members need meaningful investments in their safety, not more cops.