

Kobikrishna, Thushitha

From: Legislative Assembly of Ontario
Sent: May 13, 2021 6:30 PM
To: Standing Committee on Justice Policy
Cc: Teng, Deborah
Subject: Webform submission: Submission of material 39336

Submitted on Thu, 05/13/2021 - 17:12

Application ID: 39336

Submitted values are:

Bill or item of business: **Bill 251, Combating Human Trafficking Act, 2021**

Choose a topic

Do you know the bill title or business (e.g., pre-budget consultations) you'd like to speak or submit material about?

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I am submitting material as an individual

Full name

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Paste submission

STATEMENT AGAINST BILL 251

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing today as a WHAI (Women and HIV/AIDS Initiative) community coordinator situated in London Ontario, with deep concern for Bill 251. As sex working advocacy groups including but not limited to Maggie's, and Butterfly Migrant Justice Network in conjunction with the HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario have advocated this Bill will not aide women, or other marginalized folks working with the sex trade. Conflating sex

work with sex trafficking, while simultaneously reducing the Bills scope from human trafficking to just sex trafficking demonstrates a lack of consideration for those placed at risk. Trafficking can occur and does occur within Ontario; however, trafficking occurs within the agricultural industry, factory production, personal care work and hospitality and the reduction in this Bill minimizes the expansive potential for harm across sectors. This Bill through zeroing in on ‘sex trafficking’ and conflating it with sex work creates a state of hyper surveillance and violence for sex workers. As stated by Maggie’s “Bill 251 gives unchecked power to police and a new cadre of “inspectors” — including the ability to conduct sweeping surveillance with no oversight. This will put more Black, Indigenous and racialized communities, especially migrants, youth, women and sex workers at risk.”

Again, as Maggie’s writes in their open letter addressing concerns found within Bill 251:

“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 the reach, infrastructure and technologies of policing. 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. Survivors need support, not more policing.”

Butterfly Migrant Sex Workers Support Network in conjunction with HALCO has urged “the government to take a human rights-based approach that centers labour rights, migrant rights, and sex workers’ rights and addresses structural barriers, including poverty, precarious immigration status, and lack of access to affordable housing, health and social services that contribute to the risks of human trafficking.”

Writing from my role as WHAI worker, I am deeply concerned about the implications this Bill will have on some of Ontario’s most marginalized women and the potential increase in HIV acquisition. Increased policing will not increase access to healthcare, increase HIV testing, or increase the number of people who adhere to their medication, or increase safe sex practices. Further criminalization of sex work will no doubt drive women and other marginalized people who are already difficult to connect with for fear of surveillance and punitive measures further away from social services. Women and men I connect with through my role discuss on length that one of the biggest threats to their safety is avoiding the police, and thus they are not able to negotiate their own safety, take the precautions they would like to, or enjoy the full range of autonomy that they are entitled to. While I apologize for the limited citations within this letter I ask you to instead look at the experts within the sex working field – sex workers and the organizations that represent them. Groups outside of this sphere are moralising an issue with practical ramifications that they will never know or experience. The moral concerns of sex work aren’t the states issue, however, the inability to reach women for HIV testing, inability to offer support and referrals to other social services, or the ability for these women to adequately seek protection via the police or via harm reduction methods/agencies is the states issue. Sex workers are experts in their own field, and as an HIV/AIDS worker I urge you to heed their perspective and in turn, support their best health.

Signed

Olivia Smith Rodrigues

WHAI Coordinator,

Women’s HIV/AIDS Community Development Coordinator, RHAC