



*“The first time I told my story as a sex worker it was to a social worker. I was a seventeen-year-old runaway and this social worker was determining if and how I was surviving without parental support, and if I would qualify for government assistance. I don’t know why exactly I outed myself as an underage sex worker and shared parts of my story. Maybe evoking pity was the strongest, most practised strategy I had at the time. Maybe I was simply a terrified kid who was truly desperate for anyone to see me. What I know now is that this moment - of watching the social worker tick boxes on a form while sliding a box of tissues across her desk at me - clinched a sickly association between telling my story and fear.”*

Amber Dawn, “Every Time a Sex Worker Is Written about in an Institution Form, a Poem Dies” in Hustling Verse: An Anthology of Sex Workers’ Poetry, ed. By Amber Dawn and Justin Ducharme (Vancouver: 2019, Arsenal Pulp Press)

Members of the Standing Committee;

By enacting Bill 251 you will increase police violence and harassment of sex workers while failing to prevent trafficking or protect youth. We write this submission to make clear the immense harm you will cause by passing this Bill.

Through Bill 251, you create a new group of “inspectors” who have overbroad, arbitrary, and grossly disproportionate enforcement powers. These inspectors will have the ability to search “any place” without a warrant or any notice to determine compliance with as-yet undefined regulations. Inspectors can also “question a person on any matter that is or may be relevant to the inspection, including questioning a person separate from others.” When conducting these warrantless searches, inspectors can examine, demand, remove, or copy any “thing that is or may be relevant to the inspection.”

Your Bill codifies surveillance of sex workers and other over-policed communities, first by requiring accommodations providers to track their guests and by allowing for enhanced state control of “entities that ... disseminate advertisements for sexual services and entities that operate



platforms for such advertisements.” These regulations will allow the State to compel platforms’ and businesses’ cooperation with law enforcement. This further stigmatizes sex work and forces sex workers into riskier, less public, and less sex-worker controlled working conditions by allowing businesses and platforms to surveil and retaliate against sex workers using their services. Further, it will do so by increasing the power of children’s aid societies to apprehend people under the age of 18 from their communities based on speculation and officer’s discretion.

We will see a decision to pass this Bill for what it is: an under-handed attempt to increase police power over sex-workers through intimidation and surveillance. You use this Bill as a legislative sleight of hand to further expand law enforcement’s ability to act violently, cruelly, and arbitrarily in their treatment of sex workers. Your proposed legislation expands these powers by granting enforcement officers new, broad, and highly discretionary powers while also increasing the number of law enforcement officers on the street, directly contrary to the desires and calls from over-policed and criminalized communities.

The Community Justice Collective provides legal support to organized communities and social justice movements in the Greater Toronto Area. In this, the biggest city in Ontario, there can be no doubt as to community members’, academic experts’, and human rights advocates’ position regarding policing and law enforcement officers. It is clear that this Bill is being passed to increase law enforcement power while flying under the radar of mounting public pressure to defund and abolish policing, apprehensions and incarceration. Queer, racialized and Indigenous youth, and youth living with mental and physical illness will not and can not be protected by the police or law enforcement officers. Sex-workers are not and can not be protected by the police or law enforcement officers. Rather, as report after report and death after death and disappearance after disappearance have demonstrated with ever increasing clarity and sobriety, the mechanism of policing and apprehension that exists today serves only to systemically control, dispossess, and stigmatize vulnerable people and members of oppressed communities.

Bill 251 is framed as serving a protective function, aimed at holding individuals accountable for their actions. **Meanwhile, communities are being hurt and the systemic forces and individual actors responsible for upholding those systems are not being held accountable in any way.**



The framing of this Bill disguises the systemic realities that have given rise to these conditions, thereby serving the goals of those who exploit human beings while successfully selling a narrative that they are serving oppressed communities. This is a mask.

We ask that you take responsibility for the immense harm you will cause with these laws. Rather than listening to community members, you have decided to create an expanded police force, granted that force excessive powers, and premise that forces' mandate on a failing law enforcement model. By passing this Bill, you create the inevitable outcome: law enforcement officers using their unrestrained power to harass, intimidate, injure, and investigate sex-workers and over-policed and criminalized communities.