

May 13, 2021

RE: BILL 251 - COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING ACT, 2021

We are writing to you today to express our concerns with Bill 251, the *Combating Human Trafficking Act*, 2021. We are members of Friends of Chinatown Toronto — a grassroots group fighting for affordable housing, economic justice, and racial justice in Toronto's downtown Chinatown. We work to build community power and resist displacement in Chinatown. We centre the needs of working class, senior, and im/migrant communities who live or work in the neighbourhood, and who rely on Chinatown to meet their needs.

As a neighbourhood group fighting against the impacts of racism and gentrification, we see every day how safety is deeply tied to affordable housing, food security, decent wages, equitable access to health services, and community care. We do not believe that police, prisons, and the criminal justice system keep our communities safe. In our own work, we have been outspoken in defunding the police, and have pushed back against police surveillance in Chinatown.

We are deeply concerned about the ways in which Bill 251 will expand law enforcement powers— and the impact this will have on our Asian migrant community members, particularly massage workers, sex workers, and workers with precarious status — many of whom live or work in Chinatown. We support the joint submission of Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network) and the HIV Legal Network, and echo their concerns about the harms this bill will bring. In particular, we would like to highlight the following concerns:

- **Bill 251 erroneously conflates human trafficking with sex work.** Research has shown that anti-trafficking investigations are ineffective for tackling human trafficking, and instead have the effect of increasing law enforcement's surveillance, harassment, detention — and in some cases, deportation — of sex workers. This will have a disproportionate impact on racialized and migrant sex workers.
- **Bill 251 would expand law enforcement powers and give inspectors the ability to enter any location without a warrant or notice to investigate human trafficking.** We are deeply concerned about the impact that this will have on migrant Asian workers who do not speak, or are not fluent in English.

- **Bill 251 will increase law enforcement's ability to surveil, detain, and interrogate sex workers**, pushing them to work in unsafe spaces and putting their health and safety at risk.

We view the expansion of police powers under Bill 251 an extension of anti-Asian violence as the most vulnerable members of our community will be disproportionately affected under this new legislation. We are concerned about how this bill will increase Chinatown community members' risk of being arrested or charged as a result of their immigration status, or due to minor business-related offences. We are also deeply concerned about the impact that these expanded powers will have on all Black, Indigenous, and racialized people, as well as migrants with precarious immigration status. These groups already experience disproportionate violence and harm from law enforcement, and Bill 251 — through its sweeping expansion of surveillance and law enforcement powers — will only increase this risk.

We urge the Ontario government to follow Butterfly and the HIV Legal Network's recommendations to centre labour rights, migrant rights, and sex workers' rights in their approach to combating human trafficking. This means addressing the structural barriers that increase the risks of trafficking — such as poverty, precarious immigration status, a lack of affordable housing, and barriers to accessing health and social services. **We urge the government to reject Bill 251 and to engage meaningfully with labour rights, migrant rights, and sex workers' rights groups to understand the perspectives of the communities who will be most adversely harmed by this bill.**

Thank you for taking the time to review our concerns.

Regards,

Friends of Chinatown Toronto
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