



Dear committee members on Justice and Community Safety,

I understand that the ACT Attorney-General Simon Corbell has commissioned an inquiry into the ACT prostitution industry. Current research into the effectiveness of the Prostitution Act 1992 has shown that there appears to be an increase in the illegal sex industry. As the original legislation was passed with the intention of decreasing the illegal sex industry, I believe we need to examine our motives if the legislation is to remain the same.

How many women and girl prostitutes currently working in the brothels of Canberra intended the sex industry to be their chosen career path? Alternatively, for those women and girls who are working in the sex industry as a means to fund their studies or future career, the question remains: how many women and girls successfully leave the sex industry? What is our city doing to assist prostitutes in the transition to finding work outside brothels? It appears there is a need for exit support programs for those prostitutes seeking to leave the industry. This then leads to further questions regarding the long-term effect this work has on these women and girls.

More research needs to be done; there are too many unanswered questions. What damage and impact is the sex industry having on these women? Do we really know what the work conditions are like for these women? What is causing many of these women to display post-traumatic stress symptoms not dissimilar to those displayed by soldiers who return from battle. More research is needed to discover what these women are enduring, such as; physical abuse, mental health problems, criminal links and drug addictions. Another way to explore this is to ask whether these women are or go on to be well-balanced contributing members of our society as a result of working in the sex industry.

This is a complex issue, which needs delicate and thorough examination before a conclusion is made. It may be timely for the government to review how other countries are facing up to the issue of the illegal sex industry. Sweden has adopted a method where by prostitutes are viewed primarily as victims and the purchaser of sex is prosecuted accordingly. This approach has proven to be very successful: street prostitution has halved as a direct result of the criminalisation of prostitution (Prohibition of the Purchase of Sexual Services – An Evaluation 1999-2008). In contrast, a review of the Queensland governments prostitution regulation, a similar system to that which is found in Canberra, has shown that after 10 years, only 10% of the sex industry is regulated, while the other 90% remains illegal (Andreas Schloenhardt & Human Trafficking Working Group, The University of Queensland, TC Beirne School of Law).

Canberra, as the capital of Australia, has a responsibility to actively work towards successful solutions for issues that the community believes to be important. I believe that 1992 prostitution Act has been unsuccessful in combating the illegal sex industry that it was originally put in place to combat. I believe more needs to be done to assist prostitutes in transitioning out of the sex industry. I believe that prostitutes working in the sex industry are not being supported and as a society we are largely ignorant of their working conditions and the problems they face within the industry. The new research on the Criminalisation of Prostitution in Sweden has proved that the only successful way to tackle the illegal sex industry is to view prostitutes as victims and purchases of sex as criminals. Legalisation of prostitution increases the illegal sex industry.

I ask you to consider carefully as you review the 1992 Prostitution Act. Remember that you are the guardians of these women and girls, some of whom are the most vulnerable in our society and the least able to speak for themselves.

Thankyou for reading my letter,

Leah Ashman
22 Years Old.

Volunteer working with women affected by prostitution.

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