



February 15, 2024

RE: Support for H7452 - “Relating to State Affairs and Government - Corrections Department”

To the House Judiciary Committee,

We want to express Woodhull Freedom Foundation’s strong support of H7452, repealing provisions that assess additional fees to those convicted of prostitution-related offenses and repealing the crime of loitering for prostitution.

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation is a national human rights organization and has been fighting for sex workers’ fundamental human rights since it was founded in 2003. In 2011, we traveled to Geneva for the first Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in the United States. For the first time ever, the U.S. Federal Government officially condemned violence and discrimination against sex workers! Working with our allies, we called on the US to accept Recommendation 86, which called on the US to look into the special vulnerability of sex workers to violence and human rights abuses. We were successful, and in the report released to the United Nations, the U.S. states, *“We agree that no one should face violence or discrimination in access to public services based on sexual orientation or their status as a person in prostitution, as recommendation [#86] suggests.”*

It is in our capacity as a human rights organization with a decades-long history of advocating for sex workers' fundamental human rights that we testify today in support of H7452.

Under the current law, people who are charged with commercial sexual activity are subject to additional fines beyond those already required by law for criminal convictions. That fact alone makes the treatment of sex workers discriminatory and violates their fundamental human rights. Section 2 of H7452 will eliminate those discriminatory charges.

The current law “Loitering for Prostitution” ignores evidence that these laws are discriminatory as they are disproportionately enforced against communities of color and transgender people. The law is constructed so vaguely it allows law enforcement to judge a whether someone is committing the crime of prostitution based on their appearance. Section 3 of H7452 removes this human rights violation.

It is worth noting here that Rhode Island’s “Special Legislative Study Commission Ensuring Racial Equity and Optimizing Health and Safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals” issued a report in 2023 recommending the removal of additional penalties for commercial sexual activity and the repeal of loitering for prostitution.



It is critical that you pass H7452 in order to protect the fundamental human rights of marginalized communities, ensure that biases cannot lead to unnecessary criminalization, and stop creating devastating financial burdens for those already experiencing hardship.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ricci J. Levy".

Ricci J. Levy
President & CEO
Woodhull Freedom Foundation