

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Majority Leader  
New York State Senate  
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker  
New York Assembly  
Albany, NY 12224

CC: The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor, State of New York  
New York State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

**Re: Coalition of Advocates Urges Passage of Cecilia’s Act for Rights in the Sex Trades S2513/A3251  
(Salazar/Souffrant Forrest) to Decriminalize Sex Work & Clear Prior Convictions**

The undersigned organizations are sex worker-led organizations, civil rights organizations, Black, brown, and Asian empowerment groups, LGBTQ+ equity groups, harm reduction groups, immigrant rights organizations, and others that work to elevate sex workers, massage workers, and survivors of human trafficking. We urge the legislature to pass Cecilia's Act for Rights in the Sex Trades (Cecilia's Act), S2513 (Salazar)/A3251 (Souffrant Forrest). This critical legislation amends statutes so that consenting adults who trade sex, collaborate with or support peers, or patronize adult sex workers will not be criminalized.

[Amnesty International](#), the [World Health Organization](#), [UN AIDS](#), and more than [250 scientists](#) recognize that comprehensive decriminalization - as proposed in Cecilia’s Act- is the best way to reduce coercion in the sex trade, while also reducing STI transmission, reducing police violence, and enabling sex workers to employ harm reduction and safety tools. This is because comprehensive decriminalization enables sex workers to screen clients, negotiate condom use, and work collaboratively without the fear of criminalization. It also enables sex workers to seek medical or legal help without fear of economic consequences or legal repercussions.

The policing of sex work amongst consenting adults, is [acutely racist](#). In New York City, nearly 93% of the NYPD’s targets for purchasing sex are Black, brown or Asian, while 90% of those targeted for selling sex are people of color. These arrests are perpetrated by the NYPD’s Vice squad, which has gone by many different names over its sordid history. A recent [ProPublica report](#) provides numerous accounts of former Vice squad members targeting men of color, and intentionally arresting men engaged in innocuous behavior solely for the purpose of increasing overtime pay. Gay and bisexual men have similarly been targeted and arrested by Vice officers. In the same report, numerous former Vice officers recount how members of the unit use their positions to coerce sexual favors from sex workers and entrap almost

exclusively Black and brown men for patronizing arrests. Some arrests can even be deadly – in 2018, an Asian sex worker in Queens complained that she was sexually assaulted by a gun-wielding officer. When that officer returned to the worker’s place of employment, she jumped nearly forty feet to her death rather than risk further assault by the officer. Cecilia’s Act promises an end to this discriminatory, harmful, and inefficient policing.

**Cecilia’s Act does not repeal statutes that criminalize human trafficking, the sexual exploitation of minors, or the violence and coercion that we know exists in *some* sectors of the sex trade. We firmly believe that all workers should be safe in their workplace and should be protected against force, fraud, or coercion, including physical, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse, violence, threats of violence, or violence against others.**

Further, the Cecilia’s Act provides post-conviction relief in the form of sealing convictions under the statutes Cecilia’s Act repeals. We know the consequences of criminal convictions – economic insecurity, deportation, housing instability – and we know that New Yorkers of color are arrested and convicted at higher rates relative to their share of New York’s population. We have witnessed how a criminal record for prostitution may prevent professional and personal growth, leaving those who wish to exit the sex trade with few avenues to do so. We have also seen arrests which ultimately lead to the deportation of undocumented sex workers.

Cecilia’s Act recognizes that New York State’s current sealing system is underutilized – less than 0.5% of eligible New Yorkers have received sealing orders. Cecilia’s Act, with its automatic sealing provisions, ensures that those with prostitution related convictions can immediately receive the benefits of sealing.

Alternatively, [prohibitionist/asymmetrical criminalization models](#) which claim to decriminalize workers while criminalizing purchasers, nonetheless *continue to criminalize workers who live and work together*, often motivated by safety concerns. These models do not ameliorate police violence and make it harder, in fact, to [negotiate condom use](#). Prohibitionist model countries, such as France, Sweden, and Ireland have only driven the sex trade further into the shadows, which ultimately harms consensual sex workers and survivors of trafficking. Cecilia’s Act is the only bill to reduce trafficking through an **evidence-based human rights approach**: one that restores dignity, agency and bodily autonomy, while preventing violence and dismantling the oppressive systems that harm those involved in commercial sex.

Sex work is credited as the “oldest profession”. It will continue as long as there is an economic need to trade sex. It is imperative that sex workers be able to work safely. We urge New York to follow the advice of leading world health and civil rights organizations, and decriminalize sex work for consenting adults. It is one of many important steps reduce harm for sex workers, and survivors of human trafficking. Cecilia’s Act for Rights in the Sex Trades (S2513/A3251, Salazar/Souffrant Forrest) is the only bill that does this. Please reach out to [DecrimNYCoalition@gmail.com](mailto:DecrimNYCoalition@gmail.com) with any questions.

	<u><b>Decriminalization</b></u>	<u><b>Legalization</b></u>	<u><b>Prohibition/ Asymmetrical Criminalization</b></u>
<i><b>Description</b></i>	<p>Removal of criminal penalties for sex trade participation that does not involve trafficking, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling sex</li> <li>• Buying sex</li> <li>• Living with, working with, and associating with sex workers</li> <li>• Enables sex workers to live together, work together, and organize for better working conditions</li> </ul>	<p>Strict regulation of what is considered “illegal” vs. “legal” sex work, often includes strict licensing and registration requirements, fostering an underground illegal market of vulnerable sex workers who are left out of licensing schemes</p>	<p>Seeks to end sex trade by ending “demand” for it</p> <p>Removal of criminal penalties for selling sex but <b>maintains or increases</b> criminal penalties for buying sex and living with, working with, and associating with sex workers, including for sex workers themselves</p>
<i><b>Who is criminalized?</b></i>	<p>Those engaging in violence, exploitation or trafficking. Anyone who promotes, traffics, or purchases sex from a minor.</p>	<p>Black and Brown Trans women, undocumented migrants, street-based workers, low-income sex workers</p>	<p>Everyone, including sex workers themselves</p>
<i><b>Examples</b></i>	<p>Belgium, New Zealand, New South Wales (Australia)</p>	<p>Germany, Netherlands</p>	<p>Sweden, France, Ireland</p>

**\* Cecilia’s Act for Rights in the Sex Trades, S2513/A3251A (Salazar/Souffrant Forrest) is the decriminalization model, while S2005/A1465 (Krueger/Hunter) employs the prohibitionist model/asymmetrical criminalization. Only the Cecilia’s Act is part of the Justice Roadmap, the New York Worker Justice Agenda, and the New Pride Agenda NYS LGBTQ+ Community Agenda.**

*Signed,*

*Albany Damien Center*

*The Ali Forney Center*

*Any Positive Change Inc*

*Bay Area Workers Support (BAWS)*

*A Better Balance*

*BIPOC Collective*

*The Black Sex Worker Collective*

*Black Trans Nation*

*Bridges4Life*

*The Bronx Defenders*

*Brooklyn Defender Services*

*Callen-Lorde Community Health Center*

*Center for Constitutional Rights*

*Chicago House and Social Service Agency*

*Colectivo Intercultural TRANSgrediendo*

*College and Community Fellowship*

*Committee on LGBT Affairs of the New York County Lawyers Association (NYCLA)*

*Community Outreach through Radical Empowerment (CORE)*

*Common Justice*

*Community Rising Project*

*Cyborg Dreamz LLC*

*DBGM, Inc.*

*Decrim NY*

*Decriminalize Sex Work*

*Democratic Socialists of America, Troy Chapter*

*Disabled Sex Workers' Coalition*

*Downtown Independent Democrats*

*ECLI/VIBES*

*Erie County Bar Association*

*Equality New York*

*Fight for the Future*

*Free Speech Coalition*

*Freedom Network USA*

*GAPIMNY—Empowering Queer & Trans Asian Pacific Islanders*

*Hack Hustling*

*Harlem United*

*HIPS*

*Housing Works*

*Immigrant Defense Project*

*Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club*

*The Legal Aid Society NYC*

*Lambda Legal*

*Long Island Social Justice Action Network*

*Manhattan Young Democrats*

*Make the Road New York*

*National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)*

*National Harm Reduction Coalition*

*New Hour for Women & Children LI*

*NEW Pride Agenda*

*New York Civil Liberties Union (ACLU of NY)*

*The New York State LGBT Health and Human Services Network*

*Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center*

*Queer|Art*

*Rainbow Access Initiative*

*Old Pros*

*On The Bright Side LLC*

*Pineapple Presents, LLC*

*Policing and Social Justice Project*

*Prisoner's Brain Trust*

*Release Aging People From Prison/RAPP Campaign*

*Reframe Health and Justice*

*The Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center*

*Sabra Boyd LLC*

*Saint James Infirmary*

*Sex Workers Advocates Coalition (SWAC)*

*Soar Institute*

*Southwest Recovery Alliance*

*S.T.O.P. - Surveillance Technology Oversight Project*

*Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Policy Initiative (SJI), Loyola Law School*

*SWOP (Sex Worker Outreach Project, Brooklyn)*

*Tacoma Needle Exchange*

*Transgender Equity Consulting*

*Transgender Law Center*

*US PROStitutes Collective*

*Verity ~ Compassion. Safety. Support.*

*Woodhull Freedom Foundation*

*Youth Represent*

*Zepp Wellness Center*