



Affirming Sexual Freedom as a Fundamental Human Right

woodhullfoundation.org

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee
Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, State of Rhode Island
Rhode Island State Capitol
Providence, RI 02903

The Honorable Jason Knight
First Vice Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, State of Rhode Island
Rhode Island State Capitol
Providence, RI 02903

The Honorable Matthew S. Dawson
Second Vice Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, State of Rhode Island
Rhode Island State Capitol
Providence, RI 02903

April 15, 2026

RE: Woodhull Freedom Foundation Support for H8057 - “An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses - Commercial Sexual Activity”

To the House Committee on the Judiciary,

Woodhull Freedom Foundation submits this written testimony in strong support of [H8057](#), which would decriminalize commercial sexual activity.

Woodhull Freedom Foundation is an organization dedicated to defending sexual freedom as a fundamental human right. Woodhull protects individuals’ rights across the United States to enjoy sexual dignity, privacy, and consensual sexual expression without societal or governmental interference, coercion, or stigmatization. As part of this work, we seek to end the unjust criminalization of consenting adults who trade sex, collaborate with or support peers, or patronize adult sex workers. We at Woodhull have also meticulously analyzed the research on sex work decriminalization in our [Fact Checked by Woodhull](#) series, where we address the [pervasive myths about sex work which have justified its criminalization](#) and have led to innumeral harms against workers and trafficking survivors.

Extensive research and evidence show that repealing laws that criminalize consensual adult sex work will help end human trafficking, improve public health, and promote community safety. In 2023, the “Special Legislative Study Commission Ensuring Racial Equity and Optimizing Health and Safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals” specifically recommended that Rhode Island legislators ensure that “private, consensual sexual activity remains out of the reach of criminal laws”. The Commission found that the criminalization of sex work “fuels stigma and discrimination against sex workers, which impedes their access to basic necessities, including

healthcare, housing, and other social services.” Decriminalizing sex work allows workers more access to critical services without the harms of criminalization.

H8057 repeals all commercial sexual activity laws while preserving laws against human trafficking. This will bolster anti-trafficking efforts around the state. Prostitution laws direct law enforcement resources towards consenting adults, limiting their ability to focus on human trafficking. Additionally, when commercial sexual activity is illegal, it continues to happen - but its criminalization leads to unsafe conditions; it limits sex workers’ ability to create safety networks, work together, screen clients, and seek necessary services.

Between 1980 and 2009, indoor prostitution was legal in Rhode Island. During that time period, there was a significant decline in sexually transmitted diseases and sexual assaults within the state. Rhode Island legislators should return to policies that had demonstrable positive effects on public health and safety in the state.

Leading organizations, including the World Health Organization, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, have endorsed decriminalization as the best way to combat trafficking, reduce harm, improve health outcomes, and uphold human rights. Criminalizing sex work has consistently failed to protect people; instead, it only increases stigma, pushes workers into unsafe conditions, and limits their ability to report violence or seek help. Decriminalization, by contrast, allows sex workers to access basic protections, healthcare, and legal rights, creating safer communities for everyone.

This legislature has already passed several of the policies recommended by the study commission, and should continue to heed the advice of experts and community members. It is critical that you pass H8057 to decriminalize commercial sexual activity in Rhode Island. This policy change will address systemic inequality and create more equitable and safe communities for all.

Your consideration of these matters is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,



Ricci Joy Levy
President & CEO
Woodhull Freedom Foundation