

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: Woodhull Freedom Foundation Advocates for the passage of the “Cecilia’s Act for Rights in the Sex Trades”, New York State Senate Bill S2513 and Assembly Bill A3251 relating to the decriminalization of sex work

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation is an organization dedicated to defending sexual freedom as a fundamental human right. It is in that capacity that we strongly advocate for the passage of the “Cecilia’s act for rights in the sex trades”, New York State Senate Bill [S2513](#) and Assembly Bill [A3251](#), relating to the decriminalization of sex work. Woodhull joins a coalition of [more than 80 community groups](#) calling for the urgent passage of these bills, including sex worker-led organizations, civil rights organizations, human 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. Together, we are urging New York State legislators to pass S2513 and A3251 to end the unjust criminalization of consenting adults who trade sex, collaborate with or support peers, or patronize adult sex workers.

In passing Cecilia’s Act and decriminalizing sex work, New York State will lead the way in making the sex trades safer by protecting the human rights of sex workers and preventing human trafficking in the industry. Woodhull joined our allies in signing a [coalition letter](#) outlining the critical importance of S2513 and A3251 to protect the human rights, health, and safety of all people in the sex trades. Woodhull also addresses pervasive myths about the sex trade in our series [Fact Checked by Woodhull](#), including how [criminalizing sex work does not improve safety or public health](#).

As legislators, we know that you need the facts to craft effective laws that serve the interests of your constituents by making them and their communities safer and healthier. It is a fact that decriminalizing sex work unequivocally serves this purpose, which [vast research](#) and [evidence prove](#). Through

comprehensive sex work decriminalization, Cecilia's Act will address coercion in the sex trade by creating an environment in which sex workers and trafficking survivors enjoy their right to health, housing, bodily autonomy, freedom, education, privacy, expression, equal protection before the law, and choice of employment.

Sex work decriminalization achieves this by removing the threat of arrest, which abusers, including police, use to coerce sex workers into performing services under duress or controlling victims of trafficking. Decriminalizing sex work also creates safer dynamics between sex workers and their clients, allowing workers to more effectively screen clients and negotiate condom use, which lowers STI transmissions and improves public health. Sex workers are also able to more effectively employ other harm reduction and safety tools, including working collaboratively. When sex workers and trafficking survivors no longer face the life-altering consequences of criminal records, they also experience fewer barriers to housing and education, which are critical protective factors against exploitation. Additionally, under decriminalization, sex workers can seek social, medical, or legal services without fear of economic consequences or legal repercussions. Prominent human rights, public health, and anti-trafficking organizations, including [Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#), [Freedom Network USA](#), the [Human Rights Campaign](#), the [ACLU](#), [UNAIDS](#), the [World Health Organization](#), and the [Global Network of Sex Work Projects](#) recognize these crucial benefits of sex work decriminalization.

By decriminalizing sex work and making the sex trades safer, S2513 and A3251 will honor the memory of [Cecilia Gentili](#), for whom the Act was renamed from the [Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act](#) when introduced for the third time this legislative session. Cecilia was an original founder of [Decrim NY](#) and a drafter of the [sex work decriminalization legislation first introduced in 2019](#). She was a fierce advocate for sex work decriminalization to address the disproportionate harms of criminalization on Black and Brown Trans women, undocumented migrants, street-based workers, and low-income sex workers. Cecilia, along with the Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center, demonstrated the [disproportionate harms of criminalization](#) on these communities in a series of fact sheets overviewing trends in police arrests between 2006 and 2021 in New York City.

Cecilia's Act will end the [acutely racist ways in which the sex trades are policed](#) under criminalization and create pathways for redress by those currently targeted for arrest and police harassment. This will be done by removing criminal penalties for selling sex, buying sex, and/or living with, working with, and associating with sex workers. To address the legacy of harm from sex work criminalization, Cecilia's Act provides post-conviction relief in the form of sealing convictions under the statutes that will be repealed. Critically, S2513 and A3251 **WILL 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.

In this moment of unprecedented attacks on human rights and the cruel targeting of trans communities across the country, Cecilia's Act for Rights in the Sex Trades (S2513/A3251, Salazar/Souffrant Forrest) is needed now more than ever. This is the only legislation that will stop trafficking in the sex trade while ensuring the safety and dignity of all people involved in commercial sex.

Your consideration of these matters is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,



Ricci Joy Levy
President & CEO
Woodhull Freedom Foundation