



*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

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## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CALL ON CONGRESS TO PROTECT SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS IN FIGHT TO END TRAFFICKING OF PERSONS**

Washington, D.C. – Women's rights organizations call for the U.S. Congress to shelve legislation that would undermine the human rights of sex workers and efforts to end trafficking of persons.

The legislation introduced in both the House and Senate, "Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act" SESTA (S. 1693) and "Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act" FOSTA (H.1865), claims to address trafficking of persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Instead, it makes the online facilitation of prostitution a federal crime punishable by up to ten years imprisonment. In doing so, the legislation would undermine efforts to protect sex workers from violence, provide harm reduction services, and identify and support survivors of trafficking by pushing trafficking further underground. It also violates sex workers' rights to freedom of association and free speech.

Women's rights organizations Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) and the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), strongly oppose this legislation, and urge Congress to refocus its efforts toward protecting the human rights of all individuals, including sex workers.

"By removing online platforms for sex workers, the legislation eliminates an important tool to screen clients and negotiate safe working conditions, exposing sex workers to violence and putting their lives at risk. The legislation not only harms sex workers, it will also undermine the U.S. government's own goal of ending trafficking," said Serra Sippel, President of the Center for Health and Gender Equity. "Every person should have their rights protected. Sex workers are no exception. Legislation to end trafficking should be evidence-based and include provisions to protect the rights of sex workers."

"The evidence is clear that criminalizing sex work and related acts does nothing to address trafficking," said Françoise Girard, President of the International Women's Health Coalition. "Instead, Congress should put its efforts into policies that address the causes of trafficking like unemployment and the lack of safe paths to migration, while ensuring that all survivors of trafficking receive comprehensive protection and support."

The legislation under consideration is out of step with both the public health evidence and global human rights. In 2016, Amnesty International adopted a policy that calls on governments to take specific actions to protect the human rights of sex workers including by engaging sex workers in the development of laws

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and policies that affect their well-being, ending discrimination and gender inequality and ensuring that sex workers live free from harm, exploitation, and coercion.

International agencies including UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women, the WHO and the World Bank have addressed stigma and discrimination against sex workers and have recognized the role that decriminalization plays in both improving public health outcomes and protecting the human rights of sex workers.

Earlier this month, CHANGE and IWHC were among 50 organizations that signed on to a [letter](#) organized by the National Center for Transgender Equality.

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