



February 24, 2021

Via Electronic Mail

Rhode Island House Health & Human Services Committee
HouseHealthandHumanServices@rilegislature.gov

Re: Support for H5250

Dear Chair Casey, First Vice Chair McLaughlin, Second Vice Chair Donovan, and members of the House Health & Human Services Committee:

We write on behalf of GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders (GLAD), a New England-based legal organization dedicated to creating a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation. GLAD writes in support of H5250 which will create a commission to study the impact of laws related to commercial sexual activity, methods of human trafficking, and police accountability on marginalized and targeted communities.

GLAD, along with many LGBTQ rights organizations across the country, is a strong supporter of sex worker human rights. In 2015, GLAD added its voice in support of Amnesty International's resolution on the obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of sex workers.¹ For many LGBTQ people, sex work is critical to survival, particularly for some transgender women of color who face all-too-common family rejection and vastly disproportionate rates of violence, homelessness, and discrimination in employment, housing, and education.² Whether or not they participate in sex work, LGBTQ people are regularly profiled, harassed, and criminalized based on an assumption that they are sex workers, contributing to high rates of incarceration and police brutality.³

Sex workers are part of our community. We believe that the health, safety and long-term well-being of people involved in the sex industry should be lifted up and prioritized. This bill is an important opportunity for Rhode Islanders to work together, with sex workers and sex workers' rights advocates, to study these important issues and to work to replace laws that criminalize sex work with public policies that address sex workers' real economic and safety needs.

¹ GLAD, *LGBT Rights Organizations Join Amnesty International in Call to Decriminalize Sex Work* (Aug. 20, 2015), <https://www.glad.org/post/lgbt-rights-organizations-join-amnesty-international-call-decriminalize-sex-work/> (referencing AMNESTY INT'L, *Resolution on State Obligations to Respect Protect and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers* (last accessed Feb. 23, 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/policy-on-state-obligations-to-respect-protect-and-fulfil-the-human-rights-of-sex-workers/>).

² See National Center for Transgender Equality, *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey: Report on the Experiences of Black Respondents* (Sep. 2017), <https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Black-Respondents-Report.pdf>

(describing the negative outcomes associated with black transgender women including family rejection (47%), unemployment (20%), homelessness (42% at some point), and harassment and violence (47%)).

³ See Lenore F. Carpenter & R. Barrett Marshall, *Walking While Trans: Profiling of Transgender Women by Law Enforcement, and the Problem of Proof*, 24 WM. & MARY J. OF RACE GENDER SOC. JUST. 5 (2017), available at <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1461&context=wmjowl>.

H5250 is an important step to improving the lives of Rhode Islanders engaged in sex work while better addressing the risks of exploitation and human trafficking. In particular, GLAD appreciates the bill's inclusion of directly impacted people - people who engage in or have engaged in sex work - as commission members.⁴ In study commissions, it is critical to center directly impacted community members and organizations to ensure that they are able to be key stakeholders and voices for understanding and action.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H5250, and we hope the bill will receive a favorable vote out of committee.

Sincerely,



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⁴ See H. 5250, Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2021).