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Queensland, Australia  
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Dear Washington, D.C. Council Members and Chair Charles Allen

My name is Ally-Marie Diamond. I was born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand and am Polynesian/European/Maori. I am a sex trade survivor. I am sharing my story and experiences with you, because of my severe concerns around your "**Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019**," which calls for full decriminalization of the sex trade, the current legal framework in New Zealand.

I was raped and sexually abused from the ages of 3 to 16 by my uncle, boys in school, church members and boyfriends, respectively. From a tender age, I quickly learned that the only thing men wanted from me was sex. Suffering at the hands of men and boys was my reality, my normality. Yet, the trauma I endured in the sex trade largely outweighed the trauma from my extensive childhood abuse.

How I wound up in prostitution is not an unusual one in the world of prostitution. My baby girl was taken away from me when I was a young woman. I was in huge debt thanks to a violent ex-boyfriend. I was homeless, alone, and terrified. I had nothing.

It was at that time that a friend approached me about a way out. A way to pay my debt, have somewhere to sleep and all the support I would need. My journey into the sex trade began in a small residential house, in a classy quiet suburb on the outskirts of town. There was no red light in front of the house as I had always imagined. Just a quiet off-white weatherboard home with a picket fence, driveway, and a letter box. The brothel was run by a man of Asian descent who seemed to be quite caring and nice. That first night, I was the girl in high demand, new to the scene and vulnerable. Soon after, a man said he was taking me to the city to meet his friend. He explained that I would be taken better care of, protected and that I could live and earn money on the premises.

The massage parlour was located in the city amongst seedy adult video stores. Walking up the stairs behind the man who had bought me there, I was scared, ashamed, embarrassed. My gut was telling me to run, to turn around and run fast. But where would I run to? Who would I run to? I had nowhere to go; I was alone. I was ushered into a poorly lit room. Once my eyes adjusted, I saw a lot of girls sitting there, mostly Thai, Pacific Islander, Maori. The Thai girls were young and did not speak English apart from a few basic words. A heavily pregnant girl, who didn't seem older than 16, was also there. That first night, I had over 20 men brought to me, one after another, in 24 hours. No money exchanged through my hands. It was all paid to the receptionist as they entered the parlour.

The majority of my "clients" were obese, sweaty and stank. Throughout my time in prostitution, many men threw me across the room, slapped me, called me "a useless black bitch," brutally sodomised me, told me I was worthless and should be grateful they were giving me money. Sex buyers would try sticking their entire fists into my vagina, degrade me, beat me, rape me. When I could finally catch my breath, my body hurt terribly. I was bruised, broken, my nipples were cracked and bleeding. My bottom so torn, my sheets would be covered in blood. I felt ashamed, alone, afraid, broken, worthless. The nights turned into a blur, and I became a robot. Sex came not just from clients but from everywhere - bouncers, bar managers, men and I loved the attention. Not that it was good attention, but attention that I was used to none the less. None of the money that flowed went to pay my bills. Most of it went to the manager for "living expenses."

This is the reality of prostitution. It is therefore incomprehensible to me and to so many people around the world that the Washington DC Council wants to decriminalize the sex trade and render this suffering legal.

When you talk about increasing safety by fully decriminalizing prostitution, sex buyers, pimps and other exploiters, as a New Zealander whose country decriminalized prostitution in 2003, I and countless survivors and women surviving the sex trade, can attest that safety in prostitution does not exist. Prostitution is inherently violent and a violation of our human rights.

I have been bought and sold in brothels, massage parlours and other establishments in which there were receptionists, “managers” (pimps), emergency buttons in every room, showers, and condoms. The buzzers never got used much - there was never any time before a fist or a knife got to you - and if they were used, well, no one would come.

When decriminalization advocates say that prostitution would come out into the “light,” all the abuse inherent to the prostitution goes on behind closed doors, the scariest room in any commercial sex establishment. Sex buyers will not see women any differently than as objects and their attitude to do as they please to the women they purchase – battery, rape, sodomy – does not change. Sex buyers shoved bottles, vegetables, oversized vibrators, shoe heels, batons and whatever else their warped minds could come up with, so far and so hard up my sisters vaginas they damaged their reproductive systems beyond repair. So many of my sisters got lost in those streets, with substance abuse to the point that they died of kidney and liver failure. And for those who couldn’t cope anymore, chose the only path they could see – suicide.

I started drinking to numb the pain, the shame, the life. When that didn’t work anymore, I turned to drugs. As my popularity dwindled, the violence and abuse from those men around me got worse. I would be locked in my room and only be let out to see the clients. I was watched constantly; they knew my every move.

‘Sex work’ is a glorified term for paid rape. Being purchased by men twenty times or more a day is NOT work. Sex buyers exercise terrorism against women. They may not blow up buildings or themselves, but they blew up my mind, my body, my soul. They sent me to a torture chamber from which I would never escape. This cannot be the future for disenfranchised women and girls of Washington DC, who like me, are mostly of colour.

I hear a small handful of women saying this paid rape brings them empowerment or feeds their children. I hear them speak as they protect the only road they know, the only life they know. I see them, because I too was once them, once the woman who protected my normal and the only life I knew, the only life that supported my children.

Aotearoa New Zealand would like you to think they have the perfect full decriminalization of prostitution model, but nothing is further from the truth. In fully decriminalized Aotearoa New Zealand, Indigenous, Maori, Thai and Pacific Islander women and girls are enormously overrepresented in the sex trade, a result of colonialism, racism and sexism.

Since the 2003 Aotearoa New Zealand law, street prostitution has risen by 400%. In fully decriminalized Aotearoa New Zealand, girls as young as 9 are being sold on the streets of Auckland, and 12-year olds are being bought in licensed massage parlours. Police are powerless to act, powerless to do raids, powerless to ask for ID, since these commercial sex establishments are legal businesses, and because women are independent contractors no paperwork on each woman or child is required. Sex tourism flourishes, as does sex trafficking to replenish the brothels and the market of flesh.

If you think this will not happen in Washington DC, you are sadly mistaken. Once you open the doors for criminal organisations, pimps and brothel owners, the demand will increase, and the most vulnerable, our children will be targeted, and groomed. Believe me I know; it happens every day in Aotearoa New Zealand. So, tell me – what would happen in Washington DC under full decriminalisation of prostitution? Who will protect your children in your communities?

I have heard many a politician try and explain how organised criminal networks and prostitution are not linked and how the government would protect prostituted people when decriminalising brothel owners and sex buyers. This is like saying decriminalising murder will make it happen less often, or decriminalising rape will make it occur less frequently. It is as ridiculous as it sounds. In Aotearoa New Zealand gangs and violence against women have increased since 2003. An article published by New Zealand Edge in 2018, “Why New Zealand Has so Many Gang Members,” quotes that “In a population of 4.7 million people, police count over 5,300 prospects who are angling to join gangs. Cumulatively this makes the group larger than the Army.”

In Aotearoa NZ today, the “Chow Brothers” have approved plans to build a mega brothel opposite the Sky Tower Casino in Auckland, following the example of Germany’s multi-storied, mega brothels built throughout the country following its law legalizing prostitution. Just imagine such a mega brothel opposite the White House. If “**Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019**” is enacted into law, a strong full decriminalisation of prostitution, this imagined question becomes a possibility.

I understand that your bill provides no comprehensive services or housing for prostituted people. Why would it if prostitution becomes a job like any other in Washington DC? Since prostitution has become normalised in Aotearoa New Zealand, there are zero support systems if women or children wish to exit the sex trade - no help. In a study done by Otago University 92% of women working on the streets wanted to leave but lack of finances stopped them. We need to be supporting women to exit, not supporting men to buy. If you pass your bill fully decriminalising prostitution, sex buying and brothel owning, Washington DC will be next in living the nightmare that is prostitution in New Zealand.

Passing the “**Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019**” would steal your children’s dreams, steal their hopes, steal their lives. Children need to be protected. They need to know that they can grow up in a community that is safe. Voting for full decriminalisation of prostitution will only make your communities unsafe. Brothels will be popping up in your neighbourhoods, down the road from your families and everywhere in between. Your children will be walking to school, walking past street workers, over needles, past used condoms. This will not just be traumatic for a child, it will change the way they view the world, themselves, and their sexuality. It is happening today in Aotearoa New Zealand, my native land, to my families, to my friends.

Council Members, is this the legacy you want to leave your children and grandchildren? Is this really how you want to be remembered in history, as the leaders who walked into your schools and into your communities, looked the children and their parents straight in the eyes and said “Today was a great day, Today we voted it is a man’s right to buy your body!”

Decriminalising prostitution in New Zealand in 2003 did not decrease the demand for prostitution or violence against prostituted people - it only increased both. Commodification of and violence against women is now “normalised.” A recent article published this year in the NZ Herald states that New Zealand Police are making five [strangulation arrests](#) a day. We also have the worst rate of family and intimate-partner violence in the developed world for which the Police are called every 4 minutes. Is this what you want for Washington DC? Is it really worth the risk?

In decriminalized Aotearoa New Zealand, so many of my sisters have been murdered by sex buyers or pimps. Once, a jilted ex-lover/sex buyer ran through a brothel with a sword, slaying to death a number of women. One life lost to the sex trade is too many. Since 2003 when our law decriminalised the sex trade, sex buyers and prostitution have not stopped killing women. When you vote, I ask you to remember the names of these women who have lost their lives. These prostituted women were someone's daughter, someone's mother, someone's sister. The New Zealand law failed to protect them:

- A Sex Buyer Killed a young woman, age 24, by running her over, multiple times. Her body was found in a local river.
- A [sex buyer] strangled Suzie, 36, from Christchurch.
- Nancy, 54, from Auckland.
- Mallory, 27, a young Maori woman, was murdered in Christchurch.
- A sex buyer pulls out a gun as they are driving past women on the streets of Auckland, aims it at Amber, and the bullet kills her friend Jasmine. She was only 23.
- Carmen, 32, a young South-African woman in Auckland, was murdered by a sex buyer using a child's baseball bat. Police found the body of the missing woman cut in pieces and buried in a box in the Waitakere Ranges in Auckland.
- "Sky ", 48, a Thai Woman in Auckland, murdered by her on-and-off-boyfriend, after an argument about him having to leave the apartment for an appointment with one of her clients.
- A sex buyer who had a "desire to kill" murdered Renee 22 by strangling her and then setting her body on fire.

If the Washington DC Council wants to protect vulnerable populations, you should only decriminalise prostituted people, making sure they have support services and exit strategies should they choose to exit. But the men, the pimps, the people who profit off the women and children's bodies being sold, the criminal organisations - these people need to be held accountable for buying and selling bodies for instant sexual gratification. This is not ok. This is the ugly truth of Prostitution. Men paying for the privilege to rape women without consequence because they have paid for that right and who walk free. Women and children trapped in the sex trade because no one hears their cries.

Ask yourself who will gain if your full decriminalization bill passes? To be honest, some of my best paying "clients" were politicians and council men. When parliamentarians hear my story, they still sit firmly in their belief that full decriminalisation will work even with all the evidence to suggest otherwise. Well I just have to ask the question: How does full decriminalisation benefit them?

I want to share with you my truth, my story, my journey, my experiences as a Native woman, in my native country of Aotearoa New Zealand. Yes, I was in Prostitution before 2003, but decriminalising changed the law on prostitution, not prostitution itself and not the men. If Washington, DC decriminalizes sex buying and brothels, children will learn that it is acceptable to buy another human being for sex. They will learn, as I did as a child, that exploitation, rape, abuse, and violence is normal.

I exited 20 years ago and now live in Australia, but to this day I suffer from extreme depression, C-PTSD, and Dissociative Identity Disorder. I am nevertheless grateful to be alive and to share a part of me that haunts me to this day.

I urge you, as a prostitution survivor, **not** to pass the **Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019**. For the sake of Washington, DC.