



Decriminalize Sex Work

For Immediate Release

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Government Moving Too Far, Too Fast on Prostitution Law Reform

Sex workers must be consulted, and consultation process expanded

VANCOUVER: As the Conservative government announces a [national public consultation](#) on prostitution law reform, FIRST, a feminist advocacy group for the rights of sex workers, warns that the government is moving too fast. They are urging the government to put in place an expanded consultation process that includes significant input from sex workers.

“The government has given the public only 30 days to provide input on this critical human rights issue,” said Esther Shannon, a FIRST spokesperson. “That’s far too short a time period for Canadians to weigh in on this complex issue, especially when sex workers’ lives are at stake. We know that bad laws can have horrific consequences, and that must never be taken lightly.”

The Supreme Court of Canada struck down three Criminal Code prostitution-related offences as unconstitutional, in its Dec 20 decision in *Bedford v. Attorney General of Canada*. The court left the laws in force for one year to give the government time to decide what to do, if anything.

“We urge the federal government to bring sex worker groups to the table immediately,” said Joyce Arthur of FIRST. “No law can be passed without the input of sex workers, who are the experts on this issue. It’s their livelihood, so they know best how to make it safer for themselves and for the communities they live and work in.”

Sex workers in Canada are near universally opposed to the possible re-criminalization of prostitution, because criminalization in any form violates their rights and endangers their safety. “The government should take the time to review the wealth of evidence that is now available to demonstrate the harm of criminal prostitution laws,” said Arthur. “The Supreme Court relied on this evidence to strike down the current laws.”

“It’s clear from the [consultation webpage](#) that the federal government would like to pass a new criminal law that targets clients, like we see in Sweden and Norway,” Shannon said. “However, evidence from those countries shows that this approach would continue the violence and

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other harms that Canadian sex workers experienced under the struck-down laws. A Swedish-type law would be unconstitutional on the same grounds.”

“Sex workers want the government to look at the approach adopted by New Zealand, which successfully decriminalized and regulated prostitution in 2003 after close involvement by sex worker groups,” said Arthur. “A 2008 government review found that sex workers in New Zealand are now working under safer conditions, and neither sex work or trafficking have increased.”

Shannon said the public also needs more time to get better informed on the issue. She cited surveys by [Angus Reid in 2009 and 2010](#), which found that less than a quarter of Canadians (22%) know that exchanging sex for money is legal in Canada, while 70% mistakenly believe that the practice is illegal. Regardless, the Canadian public has already spoken out decisively against criminalization. A [2011 Angus Reid poll](#) found that over two-thirds of Canadians (67%) think prostitution should be legal between consenting adults. Only 16% of Canadians support the adoption of a Swedish-type law, while almost half (42%) support the New Zealand approach.

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