

Dear Minister Grapperhaus,

The Dutch government proposes a new sex work law, the Sex Work Regulation Act (WRS). I share your concern about human trafficking and violence against sex workers. We are on the same side! No one wants to combat violence against and exploitation of sex workers more than actual sex workers! However, I am convinced that this law will lead to more violence against sex workers. I would therefore ask you to withdraw this law proposal and instead look into full decriminalization.

I think the WRS is bad because it will lead to more sex workers working illegally than at present. Illegal sex workers are more likely to be victims of human trafficking and violence. I do not want my colleagues and I to be more likely to become victims! Neither do you.

I fear that more sex workers will work illegally because the law makes demands that many sex workers will not be able to meet:

- Sex workers younger than 21 years old have no choice but to work illegally
- Migrant sex workers without a valid residence permit and/or work visa can only work illegally
- Sex workers who are found not to be sufficiently 'self-reliant' can only work illegally.

They will all be punishable. And punished with a ridiculously high fine. Younger sex workers, migrants, and those not sufficiently 'self-reliant' are the most vulnerable in our community. How will a fine make them any safer? It will only put them in debt. This law would punish the most marginalized sex workers, those who need protections the most.

I am also concerned about the registration of sex workers. All kinds of personal information about me and my colleagues will be recorded in a register. Despite the fact that the law provides guarantees with regard to the security of these data, I fear that they will still become public because of abuse of civil servants or because the security appears is inadequate. With one single, national database, we become an easy target for hackers. It is only a few steps to connect the dots from our license numbers to our BTW numbers and then to our real names and other personal details. In order to avoid this risk, more sex workers will choose to work illegally. And then these sex workers are just put at risk of abuse and violence. In addition, there is no evidence anywhere that registration and licensing helps to prevent abuse or exploitation of workers. This will only stigmatize us further and leave us in debt if we are not approved for a license and get fined, thus making us even more reliable on sex work.

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that sex work is work. It does not have to be empowering in order for it to be legitimate. Like you, we earn our money by using our bodies to provide a service, but we are not selling ourselves. Free choice of labour is a human right that is guaranteed by the Dutch Constitution. This Sex Work Regulation Act restricts the right to free choice of labour. This is a violation of a human right.

In addition, criminalisation of clients encourages violence against sex workers. It must be noted that most clients are not bad people. Many of them genuinely want to help sex workers. However, we do recognize that not everyone has good intentions. But criminalizing clients through jail time or a fine does not help us sex workers. It puts us in tougher situations. With clients, for example, it is more difficult to screen out the bad guys. We see the negative effects of criminalizing clients in every single country where paying for sexual services is illegal.

Furthermore, threatening third parties who help unlicensed sex workers with a fine or jail time will also not put sex workers in a better position of power. It might just push us farther underground, as we do not want the people who help us run our businesses to get into trouble. It is normal to receive support from third parties, such as cleaners, in other industries. Why should this be any different in the sex industry? Many times, third parties, like bodyguards or drivers, help us sex workers do our work more safely. These people should not be punished for helping us do our jobs when we have asked them to do this for us.

You and I do not want violence and exploitation of sex workers to exist, and certainly not for them to increase. The Sex Work Regulation Act increases the risk of violence and exploitation of sex workers. It also violates the privacy of sex workers. I therefore urgently ask you to retract the proposed Sex Work Regulation Act.

If you really wish to fight violence against and exploitation of sex workers, you must fully decriminalize prostitution. Under full decriminalization, human trafficking, rape, and child prostitution would still be illegal, but there would be less hurdles for us sex workers to go through in order to report abuses/exploitation if/when it occurs and receive proper support and assistance. Full decriminalization also helps tackle the stigma against sex work, which would help people find jobs outside of the sex industry if/when they want to stop doing sex work.

Sincerely,

S.A.V.E. (Sex workers Against Violence and Exploitation) members:

Lilly

Mischa

Jules

Carolien van den Honert

Merc from proud

Claudia

Sunny V.

Miss Ana Mason

Janet