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Survivor Activists Testify to Joint Committee on the Judiciary on the Need to Pass the Sex Trade Survivors Act in MA

The EMMA Coalition Calls for Passage of the Sex Trade Survivors Act

BOSTON - The EMMA Coalition, a survivor-led, statewide effort that works to dismantle systems of violence against prostituted people, is calling for support for the upcoming hearing of the **Sex Trade Survivors Act**. The Judiciary Committee is hearing testimony on May 16, 2023 at 1:00 PM on *An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors* (H.1597 / S.983), backed by the **EMMA Coalition**, and **co-sponsored by 34 members of the House and Senate**.

“As a woman of color and a provider that serves Black and brown youth, we have to stand up and create a world where no human being should be bought or sold,” said **Audrey Morrissey, co-Executive Director of My Life My Choice**.

“Massachusetts needs to support this legislation,” said **Audra Doody, co-CEO of Living in Freedom Together**. “This legislation will ensure that survivor voices are heard, break cycles of oppression and gender based violence. The Equality Model will help provide exiting services for people who want to exit the sex trade and dismantle intergenerational trauma.”

“We urge Massachusetts to pass this critical piece of legislation that would address the on-ramps into the sex trade for our most vulnerable populations here in the Commonwealth, while ending the arrest of prostituted people which does nothing but create a stigmatizing barrier to getting out,” said **Cherie Jimenez, founder and Executive Director of the EVA Center**.

“The Sex Trade Survivors Act began as a groundswell from our Worcester Community, but we quickly realized this is a statewide issue,” said **Representative Mary Keefe (D-Worcester), co-lead sponsor of the bill**. “We need this bill so that we can continue supporting survivors across the state in their efforts to regain control of their lives that were once in the control of others.”

“The Sex Trade Survivors Act is a survivor centered approach to addressing human trafficking, with survivors drafting the bill language and leading the coalition” added **Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier (D-Pittsfield), co-lead sponsor of the bill**. “The commercial sex trade impacts all corners of Massachusetts, not just Boston. Human trafficking is a feeder to the sex trade, with the Berkshires experiencing high rates of trafficking each year. This bill would help impacted individuals exit the life with a supportive, as opposed to a criminal justice focused approach.”



“This bill is an important step towards supporting survivors of prostitution and assisting prostituted persons with pathways out of exploitation,” said **Senator Cindy F. Friedman (D-Arlington), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing**. “Senator Harriette Chandler championed this bill for many legislative sessions and passing this legislation would be both a testament of her hard work and a great service to those impacted by prostitution.”

“The sex trade industry is one set up to assure people of color, especially Black women, will suffer the most. The disparities in death and violence are well documented. Assuring there will always be a price tag on Black bodies is not freeing or fair. But it is part of our legacy as a country. We know how to exploit, sell, and kill Black people,” said **Senator Lydia Edwards (D-Boston), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Housing**. “This bill is about undoing harm through a racial equity lens. No one will be left behind with this bill.”

Background

The Sex Trade Survivors Act is a survivor-led, community effort that will provide real and immediate solutions for survivors of prostitution and people impacted by the sex trade. This approach is evidence-based and has been implemented in over eleven countries, addressing structures of violence, incorporating transformative justice, and breaking cycles of oppression.

An Act to Strengthen Justice and Support for Sex Trade Survivors is filed by **Representative Keefe** and **Representative Farley-Bouvier** (H.1597) and **Senator Friedman** and **Senator Edwards** (S.983), and co-sponsored by 34 members of the House and Senate.

- This bill will decriminalize prostitution offenses for prostituted persons while maintaining penalties for traffickers, exploiters, and buyers, which is critical to limit an increase in buyer demand.
- This bill expunges prostitution convictions for prostituted persons, helping survivors with records move forward through connections to housing, employment, and other supports.
- This bill recognizes that sexual exploitation is exacerbated under capitalism and disproportionately affects Black and Brown women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and low-income people. The bill offers practical, real-world solutions to support their exit and healing from exploitation and addressing racial inequities.
- This bill will create an interagency commission to develop recommendations and advance solutions concerning prostitution and eradicating exploitation.

Together, the EMMA Coalition and their supporters hope to pass the Sex Trade Survivors Act and make a significant difference in dismantling systems of violence against prostituted people in Massachusetts and beyond.

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The EMMA Coalition is a statewide effort led by three survivor-led programs in Massachusetts: Living in Freedom Together (LIFT), My Life My Choice, and the EVA Center. The Coalition is named EMMA, to honor the missing and murdered, the nameless and the names we hide due to the daily harm and stigma placed on sex trade survivors by society. For more information please visit www.equalitymodelma.org