

Why Fully Decriminalize Sex Work?

Why Not Criminalize Buyers, or Legalize?

The movement to provide support and real safety to Black and Brown people in the sex trades is growing. Decriminalizing sex work removes the threats of arrest for engaging in sex work, police abuse, stigma, and obstacles to resources for many in the sex trades.

We fight for the “full decriminalization” of sex work, in which both selling and buying sexual services is decriminalized. Full decriminalization increases public health and safety, while decreasing stigma and barriers to resources. Sex workers tell us this, and the data shows it, too.

We only support full decriminalization of sex work, and here’s why:

Full Decriminalization  Partial Criminalization  Legalization 

Eliminates criminal penalties associated with sex work and related activities or transactions	Removes criminal penalties for sex workers, but continues the criminalization of clients and organizing	Imposes a regulatory framework with laws regarding where, when, and how sex work could take place
Reduces interactions between police and sex workers	Continues to require sex workers to avoid the police	New system, similar issues: leads to a two-tiered system of “legal” and “illegal” sex workers
Reduces stigma by acknowledging sex work is work	Becomes a “buyer’s market” and can require take more risks to protect buyers and they may be exposed to more violent clients	Continues barriers to safety and resources for those outside the legal framework
Increases safety by better enabling client screening, negotiation, cooperation with third parties for safety and transportation	Increases isolation, making it difficult to have a community and social network on the stroll	Provides allocated resources to law enforcement and other government agencies to regulate consensual, private behavior
Betters public health outcomes, including decreased risk of HIV and other STIs	Continuing criminalization of clients often still has discriminatory effect, disproportionately impacting Black and brown folks	Requires sex workers to keep up with registration fees, costs, and licences, which can be difficult for people with little money and resources