



ADVANCING FAITH, FAMILY AND FREEDOM

Written Statement of Patrina Mosley

Submitted to the Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety

October 17, 2019

Hearing on Bill 23-0318, the “Community Safety and Health
Amendment Act of 2019”

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety
Washington, D.C.
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Testimony in opposition to Bill 23-0318, the “Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019”

By Patrina Mosley

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Good afternoon. I am here today to urge the members of the Council to oppose the Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019, which would fully decriminalize the sex trafficking industry in the District of Columbia, including the acts of pimping, purchasing sex, and operating brothels.¹

This bill is a misguided attempt to help some of the most marginalized members of our society. It will only hurt the people it intends to help.

As Tina Frundt, founder and executive director of Courtney’s House, and Yasmin Vafa co-founder and executive director of Rights4Girls shared in their recent *Washington Post* op-ed², one survivor said, “I first learned about this bill from my pimp; he was excited about it.” If exploiters are excited about this bill, we should be concerned.

Studies and survivor testimonies have already shown the commercial sex trafficking industry to be inherently violent and harmful to women. Legally enabling this deeply problematic industry will only succeed in increasing sex trafficking and inviting more organized crime into the District.

The bill, as it stands, codifies the term “sex worker” as if to legitimize a women’s sexual exploitation as a profession. The following are some of the services of the so-called “work”:
“Being penetrated orally, anally, and vaginally with [genitali], fingers, fists, and objects, including but not limited to, bottles, brushes, dildoes, guns and/or animals; [b]eing bound and gagged, tied with ropes and/or chains, burned with cigarettes, or hung from beams or trees; [b]eing photographed or filmed performing these acts.”³

¹ Council of the District of Columbia, Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019, Bill 23-0318, introduced June 4, 2019, accessed October 16, 2019, <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Download/42712/B23-0318-Introduction.pdf>.

² Tina Frundt and Yasmin Vafa, “There’s a way to decriminalize prostitution without putting women at risk,” *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2019, accessed October 16, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/local-opinions/theres-a-way-to-legalize-prostitution-without-putting-women-at-risk/2019/08/02/b4ba9ec2-a742-11e9-9214-246e594de5d5_story.html.

³ WISHPER, “Help Wanted: Women and Girls Do YOU want this job?” Prostitution Research and Education, 2011, accessed October 16, 2019, <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/Help%20Wanted-%20Women%20and%20Girls%20Do%20YOU%20want%20this%20job%3F.pdf>.

Does this sound like a profession? A survey of sex buyers' attitudes towards persons in prostitution⁴ revealed that buyers view women as products for them to use as they see fit. To legitimize men buying women for sex is to say that men have a right to women's bodies by default.

Bill 23-0318 says to pimps and traffickers, "We've got your back" and to victims who endure such hazardous "work" conditions, "Good luck out there!" Laws are inherently meant to discourage certain types of behavior, and good laws promote the right kinds of behavior. This bill encourages exploitive behavior and would, therefore, be a bad law. Fully decriminalizing the sex trafficking industry would make brothels legitimate businesses, pimps and traffickers business managers, and the District a collaborator in the exploitation of women and children. Commercial sex trafficking is sexual exploitation—it should never be someone's job to be exploited by another human being.

The notion that prostitution will always exist is one reason given for bringing it "out of the shadows" and making "the industry better." But legitimizing something bad in hopes of fewer bad things happening is never an acceptable solution to society's ills. We must confront the injustice of exploitation with justice.

Empowering the business of exploitation doesn't protect anyone except the exploiters. With everything we know about the abuse and violence that characterizes the commercial sex trafficking industry, equating unobstructed exploitation with victim protection is just as absurd as saying, "since many of those who endure rape feel the stigma of shame, let's remove all penalties for rape and legitimize it so they won't feel shame."

No sensible person would say such a thing. "Protecting" victims by removing the stigma of exploiting them is an illogical solution.

If we fail to see persons caught up in prostitution as who they really are—victims of sexual exploitation—we misapply justice. Legitimizing the buying and selling of human beings only makes it easier for pimps and traffickers to groom vulnerable women, boys, and girls into thinking that sexual violence is normal and acceptable. The narrative that says decriminalizing the sex trafficking industry would help those who are willing participants only complicates the distinction between those who are "voluntary" versus the vast majority who are being abused, forced, coerced, manipulated, groomed, and controlled with drugs to perform.

Our laws must not enable the sexual exploitation business in any way. Instead, we must establish laws that recognize the inherent human dignity of every person. We must work towards practical resources to alleviate persons in prostitution.

Instead of resigning ourselves to a future of women always being bought and sold for male sexual pleasure, we should demand an end to the exploitation of women, which is long overdue.

⁴ Rachel Durchslag, and AM Samir Goswam, "Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex," Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, (May 2008): 21, accessed October 16, 2019, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Deconstructing-the-Demand-for-Prostitution%20-%20CAASE.pdf>.