

**Brief regarding Bill C36  
For the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs**

**Submitted by Monica Forrester**

My name is Monica Forrester and I am a woman of colour from Curve Lake reservation in Ontario, I am a trans woman and a street sex worker of 25 years. I have been stigmatized because of my identity, race and class. I am here to speak about sex workers who are doing the work due to choice, coercion or economic circumstance.

For many years I was homeless. I had no other options but to do sex work to survive and get the basic necessities of life and to access community. Sex work was where I found community with people dealing with the same discrimination as me.

I am now a college graduate and an outreach worker bringing community, empowerment, safety and inclusivity to all marginalized groups.

**Many don't understand street sex work or how bill C36 will affect us.**

Some work the street because they are poor and don't have the money to pay for things like a phone, computer, renting a space to work out of etc.

Some are homeless and have no other method of earning money.

For some women such as single mothers, social services are not sufficient. Ontario works provides \$718 to a single parent but the average 1 bedroom rent in Toronto is about a thousand per month. Single parents who are sex working to support their family do not want to work at home where their children live, so some work on the street.

Aboriginal women in remote areas are working along the highways in order to get from town to town. Survival sex work is necessary to feed their kids and themselves. They face added stigma within their communities because of ongoing colonization. Colonialism already silenced them about sex, and sex work adds another layer of stigma, and more isolation from their community. Aboriginal women killed by Pickton were from all over but went to downtown streets to do survival sex work.

There are migrant people and newcomers to Canada whose first language isn't English. For them advertising is difficult or impossible but they can advertise by being on the street and negotiate using a few English words.

**Bill C36 doesn't help sex workers including those who have no other choices.**

For a lot of trans women like me, because they don't have basic human rights, they can't find jobs. Recently a trans woman said to me about these new laws "Now how am I going to pay my rent, go to college or transition so I can get another job?"

This week, a 50 year old woman who's been a sex worker for her whole adult life and comes into Maggie's for safer sex supplies asked me "who's going to hire me? It's all I've ever done. Am I going to have to go on welfare now?"

### **Bill C36 will silence sex workers who experience violence**

I'm a sex worker and a front line outreach worker with 20 years experience. I have seen all of these situations first hand. What I see is that when there is more policing and surveillance, sex workers get isolated from people providing essential services and that isolation leads to vulnerability. These services include education about safer sex, safer work areas, the law, policing and community support. The street-based community is a community of it's own. It can be close-knit, we educate each other because we need each other. Bill C36 will change that because people will be more in fear of sharing information and supporting each other.

We will have to take whatever clients we can and not be able to screen for safety.

Police will push outdoor workers away from residential areas because of the restriction on being near anyone under 18. This will lead to an increase in residential surveillance and harassment. Marginalized groups like people of colour, trans women, Aboriginal women and 2 spirit women are more likely to be street based and they will face extreme criminalization under this bill.

With the internet, much of the sex industry moved indoors. By criminalizing advertising though, these workers will now be forced back out onto the street. This puts them at risk because indoor workers do not have any knowledge of street safety.

Together, all of this will increase violence, murder and HIV/AIDS against our community.

### **My recommendations**

That 20 million dollars in exit funds should be used to offer direct support to sex workers that is not dependent on them leaving the industry which many of us can't or don't want to do.

We need laws that allow us to work with safety and dignity, to make our own choices. For example the right to advertise, to hire security staff and work with buddies.

We need sex worker positive agencies like Maggie's that empower us about safety, health and well-being. The Supreme court decision should be respected because they saw the necessity of decriminalization for all sex workers whether they're in it by choice, being forced or because of economic circumstances.

Right now if we face violence, we can't call the police because it will be recorded in the system. I have never been able to call police for help even after I was sexually assaulted. At the time, I had been through mandatory diversion programs after an arrest for prostitution and knew that I faced incarceration if my sex work was discovered. So even though I was raped, I did not call police. Bill C36 would not have helped me then and it won't help me now.

Reconsider Bill C36 and the horrible outcomes it will have on the most marginalized sex workers in Canada. The fate of the sex worker community is in your hands. Thank you.