

We, ordained ministers and laity of various faith groups and denominations, wish to express our concerns regarding Bill C-36 “Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act” now before the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada.

We wish to make it clear that we continue to uphold marriage as an ideal and as the normative place for sexual relations. We have great concerns about the commodification of sex in our economy, and the exploitation and abuse of vulnerable women and men who are sex workers.

That said, we cannot support Bill C-36, for the following reasons.

First, we believe that it infringes upon the human rights of sex workers to health, safety, and life. It disregards the issues raised by the Supreme Court of Canada when it struck down the provisions of the Criminal Code that target sex workers. It simply re-inscribes the old provisions in different language, and will result in immediate legal challenges. This does not further the welfare of sex workers, but continues their marginalization.

Second, the proposed Bill C-36 will drive sex workers and their clients further underground, putting sex workers at even greater threat of violence.

Third, there was almost no consultation with sex workers or their advocates prior to the drafting of this bill; the viewpoints shared in the online consultation by these parties were not duly considered. The provisions of this bill run counter to a considerable body of sex work research conducted in Canada and other jurisdictions. The provisions of the bill are not based on evidence, but unproven assumptions.

Fourth, there is no meaningful provision to deal with the underlying economic and social conditions that result in many people engaging in sex work. This bill continues to criminalize poverty, especially amongst indigenous peoples, youth coming from government care, women with disabilities, and lower income single mothers, who are all disproportionately represented among sex workers.

This is a moral issue. While we can debate the pros and cons of sex work in our Canadian society, and bring our religious beliefs to bear upon both sides of this question, we are all agreed that this proposed legislation does nothing to advance the welfare of sex workers and in fact, it increases the potential for dangerous situations. This is immoral.

We urge the Justice Minister Peter MacKay, the Members of the House of Commons on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and the Parliament to withdraw this proposed bill. We believe broader, meaningful consultation is required for any future legislation, not only so that it will be an act which will stand up in a court of law, but so that it serves the fundamental needs of this vulnerable population.

For signatories please see attachment.

Signatories

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