

Decriminalisation review welcomed by sex workers

Respect Inc, DecrimQLD and Scarlet Alliance welcome the Palaszczuk government announcement that the decriminalisation of sex work in Queensland has been referred to the Queensland Law Reform Commission.

The Commission is tasked with undertaking a review and drafting legislation to decriminalise the sex work industry in Queensland, removing barriers to workplace health and safety and legal protections for sex workers.

“Laws in Queensland criminalise sex worker safety strategies and the licensing framework criminalises sex work workplaces, other than 21 licensed brothels, combined with excessive police powers the current legislative framework is harmful to sex workers,” Dr Jeffrey, Respect Inc, said today. “This is an opportunity for Queensland to provide sex workers the same rights and protections as other workers.”

The Prostitution Act 1999 introduced a brothel licensing system, established the Prostitution Licensing Authority and criminalised all other sex industry business models (escort agencies, erotic massage parlours, co-ops and sex workers working in pairs or from the same premise as another worker). Section 22A of the Criminal Code, makes many sex worker safety strategies illegal (letting another sex worker know where you are on a booking, checking-in at the end of a booking, driving another sex worker to an outcall, hiring a receptionist to screen bookings, working in pairs etc). The Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 allows police to entrap sex workers while posing as clients and provides immunity if they request (and undertake) illegal activities.

“Sex workers in Queensland have waited a long time for the decriminalisation of sex work and we will be working to ensure the review hears the voices of sex workers, the key stakeholders in this discussion,” said Janelle Fawkes from DecrimQLD, the sex worker committee campaigning for the change. “The call for decriminalisation has been supported by more than 30 Queensland and national organisations who have outlined legal, human rights, health, industrial, disability and safety concerns with the current laws.”

Jules Kim, CEO of Scarlet Alliance said of the referral: “The evidence that decriminalisation is a best practice approach that delivers a cost effective, high compliance model for government and community and supports optimum health, safety and rights for sex workers has been known for some time. We are finally seeing in Australia an important shift to legislation catching up with the insurmountable evidence. This welcomed announcement demonstrates Queensland is progressing long outstanding change.”

“This month the Victorian government announced its intention to decriminalise sex work with the release of its discussion paper on the model. The Northern Territory decriminalised the sex industry last year and South Australia has a Bill to abolish offences in relation to sex work before its parliament, I congratulate Queensland for taking this important first step,” Jules Kim concluded today.

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