

Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act Sign-On

The Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act (A849/S3075) Gottfried/Salazar is New York's bill to comprehensively decriminalize sex work and to provide criminal record relief for old convictions. Comprehensive decriminalization is recognized by leading health and harm reduction organizations, scientists, and many sex worker led organizations as the best way to reduce violence and coercion in the sex trade, reduce STI transmission, to empower workers to organize for safer working conditions, and to reduce the violence that the carceral system inflicts on sex workers, massage workers, and survivors of trafficking. The text of the sign on letter is below, and it can also be accessed [via this link](#). This is solely an organizational sign-on letter. If possible, please have your organization sign on by Sept. 30. If you would like to be involved as an individual, or if you have any other questions, please reach out to (708) 623 3928 or jtrujillo@nyclu.org. Please note that we will change the bill number and sponsor name on the letter in January, but you will be contacted if there are any substantive changes to the content of this letter.

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader
New York State Senate
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie
Speaker
New York Assembly
Albany, NY 12224

CC: The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor, State of New York
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Coalition of Advocates Urges Passage of S3075/A849 to Decriminalize Sex Work & Expunge Prior Convictions

The undersigned organizations are sex worker led organizations, civil rights organizations, Black, brown, and Asian empowerment groups, LGBTQ+ equity groups, harm reduction groups, immigrant rights organizations, and others that work to elevate sex workers, massage workers, and survivors of human trafficking. We urge the legislature to pass the Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act (SVSTA), S3075 (Salazar)/A849 (Gottfried). This critical legislation amends statutes so that consenting adults who trade sex, collaborate with or support peers, or patronize adult sex workers will not be criminalized.

[Amnesty International](#), the [World Health Organization](#), [UN AIDS](#), and more than [250 scientists](#) recognize that comprehensive decriminalization - as proposed in the SVSTA - is the best way to reduce coercion in the sex trade, while also reducing STI transmission, reducing police violence, and enabling sex workers to employ harm reduction and safety tools. This is because comprehensive decriminalization enables sex workers to screen clients, negotiate condom use, and work collaboratively without the fear of criminalization. It also enables sex workers to seek medical or legal help without fear of economic consequences or legal repercussions.

The policing of sex work amongst consenting adults, is [acutely racist](#). In New York City, nearly 93% of the NYPD's targets for purchasing sex are Black, brown or Asian, while 90% of those targeted for selling sex are people of color. These arrests are perpetrated by the NYPD's Vice squad, which has gone by many different names over its sordid history. A recent [ProPublica report](#) provides numerous accounts of former Vice squad members targeting men of color, and intentionally arresting men engaged in innocuous behavior solely for the purpose of increasing overtime pay. Gay and bisexual men have similarly been targeted and arrested by Vice officers. In the same report, numerous former Vice officers recount how members of the unit use their positions to coerce sexual favors from sex workers and entrap almost exclusively Black and brown men for patronizing arrests. Some arrests can even be deadly – in 2018, an Asian sex worker in Queens complained that she was sexually assaulted by a gun-wielding officer. When that officer returned to the worker's place of employment, she jumped nearly forty feet to her death rather than risk further assault by the officer. The SVSTA promises an end to this discriminatory, harmful, and inefficient policing.

The SVSTA does not repeal statutes that criminalize human trafficking, the sexual exploitation of minors, or the violence and coercion that we know exists in some sectors of the sex trade. We firmly believe that all workers should be safe in their workplace and should be protected against force, fraud, or coercion, including physical, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse, violence, threats of violence, or violence against others.

Further, the SVSTA provides post-conviction relief in the form of sealing convictions under the statutes the SVSTA repeals. We know the consequences of criminal convictions – economic insecurity, deportation, housing instability – and we know that New Yorkers of color are arrested and convicted at higher rates relative to their share of New York's population. We have witnessed how a criminal record for prostitution may prevent professional and personal growth, leaving those who wish to exit the sex trade with few avenues to do so. We have also seen arrests which ultimately lead to the deportation of undocumented sex workers.

The SVSTA recognizes that New York State's current sealing system is underutilized – less than 0.5% of eligible New Yorkers have received sealing orders. The SVSTA, with its automatic sealing provisions, ensures that those with prostitution related convictions can immediately receive the benefits of sealing.

Alternatively, [prohibitionist/asymmetrical criminalization models](#) which claim to decriminalize workers while criminalizing purchasers, nonetheless *continue to criminalize workers who live and work together*, often motivated by safety concerns. These models do not ameliorate police violence and make it harder, in fact, to [negotiate condom use](#). Prohibitionist model countries, such as France, Sweden, and Ireland have only driven the sex trade further into the shadows, which ultimately harms consensual sex workers and survivors of trafficking. The SVSTA is the only bill to reduce trafficking through an **evidence-based human rights approach**: one that restores dignity, agency and bodily autonomy, while preventing violence and dismantling the oppressive systems that harm those involved in commercial sex.

Sex work is credited as the "oldest profession". It will continue as long as there is an economic need to trade sex. It is imperative that sex workers be able to work safely. We urge New York to follow the advice of leading world health and civil rights organizations, and decriminalize sex work for consenting adults. It is one of many important steps reduce harm for sex workers, and survivors of human trafficking. The Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act (S3075/A849, Salazar/Gottfried) is the only bill that does this.

*** The Stop Violence in the Sex Trades Act (SVSTA), S3075/A849 (Salazar/Gottfried) is the decriminalization model, while S6040/A7069 (Krueger/Hunter) employs the prohibitionist model/asymmetrical criminalization. Only the SVSTA is part of the Justice Roadmap.**

 richard.corman@gmail.com (not shared) [Switch account](#) 

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