

# Hey Toronto Councillors - Please Stand Up for Marginalized Women

Tuesday, December 9, 2014 – Ottawa, ON

It's appalling that 25 Toronto Councillors have jointly sent a letter to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, asking her to refer Bill C-36 to the Ontario Court of Appeal. Even more shocking, these Councillors are requesting that the Premier actually direct police officers to not uphold the law that was just passed by the federal government.

The letter from the Councillors cites the concern that Bill C-36 will be 'dangerous for sex workers' and 'will recreate harms that previously existed under the old laws.' Their evidence of this – well they talk about experts, but provide no actual documentation. Rather, the Councillors have bought into the fear mongering by pro-legalization lobbyists – the same ones that stand to make significant financial gains off vulnerable and exploited women if prostitution is legalized. Sadly it appears the Premier has taken the bait as she mulls over her options.

The media has also jumped on the bandwagon over the weekend with multiple outlets covering the coming into force of Bill C-36 and the impending doom it will have. Many articles highlighted the 'over 60 organizations' calling for the repeal – but only ever named three organizations. The articles reiterated the call for repeal or non-enforcement without actually providing any consideration to the impact of legalized prostitution. As countries like Germany and the Netherlands have discovered, legalizing prostitution leads to increased violence against women, increased child prostitution, and increased human trafficking. This is not the future we want to create for our youth.

At least one media organization is more forthright about their motivations. For NOW Magazine, it's all about the profits. In a statement posted on December 7, 2014, NOW Magazine Editor Alice Klein defends their position of continuing to run advertising for sexual services in the name of 'feisty journalism.' Klein admits that NOW Magazine benefits from this type of advertising and "has made a principled choice to stand against discrimination and further marginalization of sex workers." But nothing about their decision is principled. NOW Magazine enjoys the financial gain it receives from advertising marginalized and vulnerable women and there is term for that – it's called exploitation. Alas, could we expect anything different from a paper that defends men who buy women as an 'oppressed sexual minority.'

The editor of Feminist Current, Meghan Murphy, is absolutely correct when she points out the hypocrisy of NOW Magazine's self-defense of standing up for rights, writing "Profiting from ads that objectify and sell women has nothing to do with human rights." Anyone who has opened up a NOW Magazine, cannot miss the pages of advertising, most of which is for sexual services through body rub parlours or 'independent sex workers.' Except when you speak to survivors and law enforcement, you will quickly discover that many massage parlours – licensed and unlicensed – are fronts for sex trafficking operations and organized crime.

The most glaring absence from both the Councillors' letter to the Premier and media reports – the voices of survivors of prostitution. During the review of Bill C-36 this past summer by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, many survivors testified about the violence inherent in prostitution. Some entered by choice, some were coerced, but all were unanimous in their call for the government to target the demand for sexual services and pimps. I would encourage the Premier and all Councillors to meet with survivors of prostitution and hear their concerns.

Law enforcement agencies, communities, and women's groups have welcomed our approach in Bill C-36 because they know first-hand that activities around prostitution are harmful to women and for society. They are not harmful because they are illegal; they are illegal because they are harmful. We must continue to criminalize the activities of pimps and johns. The legalization of their activities is unacceptable to Canadians as are elected officials who call for police to be ordered to ignore laws. It's time for Toronto Councillors to stand up for the marginalized and vulnerable.

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