

6th May 2019

Professor Rafferty, RCN President
Ms Coghill, Deputy RCN President
Members of the RCN Council

Dear Professor Rafferty, Ms Coghill and members of the RCN Council,

We are writing to you as we believe you have been sent a letter from groups and individuals who oppose the Congress hearing a motion in support of the decriminalisation of prostitution (sex work).

The claim in the letter that there is “no clear consensus” that full decriminalisation offers the best approach for harm reduction is not true. Researchers at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine have conducted a major review of all available research into health outcomes for sex workers under different legal frameworks. They concluded that the evidence shows that full decriminalisation is the most effective approach from a harm reduction perspective. This review found that sex workers who had been exposed to repressive policing had a three times higher chance of experiencing sexual or physical violence, and were also twice as likely to have HIV and/or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), compared with sex workers who had avoided repressive policing practices. They also explicitly state that the criminalisation of clients and third parties also creates harmful outcomes for people selling sex.¹

There is a wealth of support from medical and public health organisations worldwide for full decriminalisation rather than the ‘Nordic Model’ as the approach which offers better health and safety outcomes for sex workers. This includes the World Health Organisation², UNAIDS³, The Lancet⁴, and a 2018 report in the British Medical Journal⁵.

In April 2018, Médecins du Monde published a report analysing the impact of the 2016 implementation of the so called ‘Nordic Model’ in France. They surveyed 583 sex workers and

¹ Platt L, Grenfell P, Meiksin R, Elmes J, Sherman SG, Sanders T, et al. (2018) Associations between sex work laws and sex workers’ health: A systematic review and meta-analysis of quantitative and qualitative studies [<http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/associations-between-sex-work-laws-and-sex-workers%E2%80%99-health-systematic-review-and-meta>]

² New WHO guidelines to better prevent HIV in sex workers, 2012. World Health Organisation, [https://www.who.int/hiv/mediacentre/feature_story/sti_guidelines/en/]

³ UNAIDS Guidance Note, 2014: [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/SexWorkerGuidanceNote_en.pdf]

⁴ “The Lancet Series on HIV and sex workers showed that decriminalisation of sex work would have the greatest effect on the course of HIV epidemics across all settings, averting 33–46% of HIV infections in the next decade. Such a move would also reduce mistreatment of sex workers and increase their access to human rights, including health care.” [[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)61460-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)61460-X/fulltext)]

⁵ Better health for sex workers: which legal model causes least harm? [<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.k2609>]

found that 63% had experienced deterioration of their living conditions since the introduction of the law. 42% reported that they are more exposed to violence and 38% that they find it increasingly hard to demand use of condoms.

Many human rights organisations have declared their support for full decriminalisation including Amnesty International⁶ and Human Rights Watch⁷. There is also strong support from LGBT+ organisations for full decriminalisation. This year a resolution calling for full decriminalisation of sex work was passed at ILGA, a global LGBTI network representing more than 1,500 organisations.⁸

The insistence by Nordic Model Now that this widespread support by the international human rights and public health community stems from infiltration by 'pimps' rather than understanding of the evidence is, frankly, an insulting and harmful conspiracy theory. Decrim Now is a coalition of sex workers and allies from academia, trade unions and civil society groups. We encourage the members of RCN to read the evidence for yourselves and make up your own minds.

We are very well aware of the constrained situations in which people frequently enter sex work, and the need to tackle poverty, inequality and the high levels of violence which disproportionately affect the most marginalised. It is exactly for this reason that we campaign for a harm reduction approach which prioritises the safety of people currently in sex work: by removing criminalisation and reducing stigma, we can reduce sex workers' vulnerability to harm. We can start to build trust between sex workers and the public services they need access to, including healthcare.

Signed:

Decrim Now: Campaign for Sex Workers' Rights

Letter supported by:

Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM)

X:Talk Project (Migrant sex workers, London)

English Collective of Prostitutes

Scot-Pep

National Ugly Mugs

Basis Yorkshire (Support project, Leeds)

Umbrella Lane (Support project, Glasgow)

Red Umbrella at Changing Lives (Support project, Liverpool)

⁶ Amnesty International policy on Protection of Sex Workers' Rights, 2016.

[\[https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/amnesty-international-publishes-policy-and-research-on-protection-of-sex-workers-rights/\]](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/amnesty-international-publishes-policy-and-research-on-protection-of-sex-workers-rights/)

⁷ Human Rights Watch Affirm Support for Decriminalisation:

[\[https://www.nswp.org/timeline/event/human-rights-watch-affirm-support-decriminalisation\]](https://www.nswp.org/timeline/event/human-rights-watch-affirm-support-decriminalisation)

⁸International Lesbian and Gay Association Calls for Decriminalisation [\[https://ilga.org/sex-work-lgbti-organisations-call-for-decriminalisation\]](https://ilga.org/sex-work-lgbti-organisations-call-for-decriminalisation)

Open Doors (NHS support project, London)
SWAI (Sex Workers' Alliance Ireland)
Sex Workers Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN)
Red Canary Song (Migrant sex workers network, NYC, USA)
Fuckförbundet (Sex worker led group, Sweden)
Prostituertes interesseorganisasjon i Norge (PION, Sex worker project, Norway)
SWOP Behind Bars (Sex Worker Outreach Project, Florida, USA)
Lucy Smyth (UglyMugs.ie)

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)
International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) Asia Pacific

LGBTQIA+ Greens (Green Party of England and Wales)
Young Greens (Green Party of England and Wales)
Oxford University Labour Women's Caucus
Meg Howells (Oxford University Labour Club)
Arya Tandon (Oxford University Labour Club)
Lottie Sellers (Oxford University Labour Club)
Anisha Faruk (Oxford University Labour Club)
Emily Jones (Oxford University Labour Club)
IWW Couriers Network
Kings College London Justice4Cleaners

Belfast Feminist Network
Reclaim the Night Belfast
Kildare Feminist Network
University of Durham Intersectional Feminism Society

Paul Sweeney MP (Labour and Co-operative, Glasgow North East)
Natalie Bennett (Former leader, Green Party of England and Wales)
Kobe Bibbon (Liberal Democrat candidate, Longsight ward, Manchester)
April Preston (Liberal Democrat candidate, Withington ward, Manchester)
Lily Madigan (Labour Students National Women's Officer)
Steve Lapsley (National Committee, Open Labour)
Jodie McVicar (Equalities Officer Midlothian Constituency Labour Party)
Inga McVicar (Midlothian Constituency Labour Party)
Patricia Johnston (Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency Labour Party, Campaign for Socialism member)

Sex Work Research Hub
Dr Kate Lister (Lecturer in literature and history at Leeds Trinity University)
Dr Lynzi Armstrong (Lecturer in Criminology, Victoria University of, Wellington, New Zealand)
Professor Maggie O'Neill (Professor of Sociology, University College Cork, Ireland)

Dr Rosie Campbell OBE (Social policy & Social Work, University of York)
Dr Gemma Aherne (Visiting Lecturer in Sociology at Liverpool John Moore's University)
Professor Alison Phipps (Professor of Gender Studies, Sussex Uni)
Dr Victoria Bateman (Economics Fellow, Gonville & Caius College, University of Cambridge)
Professor Teela Sanders (University of Leicester)
Professor Nick Mai (Professor of Sociology and Migration Studies, Kingston University London)
Dr Mary Laing (Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Northumbria)
Professor Akwugo Emejulu (Professor of Sociology, University of Warwick)
Dr Ella Cockbain (Researcher specialising in human trafficking, sexual and labour exploitation, University College London)
Dr Steffan Blayney (University of Sheffield)
Dr Pippa Grenfell (Assistant Professor in Public Health Sociology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)
Dr Jocelyn Elmes (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)
Dr Alexander Schulenburg, FRAI, FRHistS
Fiona Meth (Lecturer in Nursing and Basis Sex Work volunteer)
Dr Gillian McNaull (Lecturer in Criminology, Queens University Belfast and co-director of QUB Gender Network)

Chloe Dominique (PhD researcher, University College London)
Kate Byard (Postgrad VP, Exeter University)

Lou Cahill RN (Sexual Health and Emergency Nurse)
John P Gilmore RGN (Senior Lecturer in Nursing, Canterbury Christ Church University. RCN Learning Rep)
Ann Cahill (Retired midwife)
Dr Raven Bowen (CEO, National Ugly Mugs)
Kellie Turtle (Belfast Feminist Network)
Charlotte Shane (Writer and former sex worker)
Janine Ewen (Trustee of Umbrella Lane, Glasgow)
Anastacia Ryan (Founder of Umbrella Lane, Glasgow)
Alex Bryce (CEO of Rights Info, and founder of National Ugly Mugs)
Kate D'Adamo (Partner, Reframe Health and Justice)
Christine Hanavan, MSW (Victim Services Provider in Florida, Community Organizer for SWOP Behind Bars)
Alexa Moore (Director of Transgender Northern Ireland)
Rachel Watters (NUS-USI Women's Officer)
Chiara Capraro
Wendy Lyon (Solicitor)
Caren Wilton (oral historian and author of My Body, My Business: New Zealand Sex Workers in an Era of Change)
J Smith (Amnesty UK Rainbow Network Committee)
Thara Raj (Consultant in Public Health)