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Bad Laws Lead to Decreased Public Safety

Sex workers say criminalization encourages police abuse and corruption; decriminalization is only effective approach to safeguard everyone's safety.

San Francisco, CA - Oakland, California, is now on its third Police Chief in two weeks, amid a [growing scandal](#) where police officers had sex with an underage sex worker, in exchange for her not getting arrested, while their supervisors looked the other way. And now the investigation has widened to include three officers in Richmond, four Alameda County sheriff's deputies, and a federal officer.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg," said Maxine Doogan of the Erotic Service Providers Legal Education and Research Project (ESPLERP). "Anti-prostitution laws corrupt police. Sex workers will tell you this is going on in police departments across the country. We have long called for laws making it illegal for cops to have sexual contact with us under any conditions, but especially as a means to gather evidence of prostitution. When police are allowed to act in this duplicitous manner, all public safety has been compromised."

"It is especially ironic that this happened in Alameda County," said Norma Jean Almodovar of ISWFACE. "They claim to be leaders in fighting human trafficking. Usually that translates into harassing and arresting sex workers. But when they did stumble across an under age sex worker seeking help escaping a pimp, the police officer didn't write her up as a trafficking victim or help her obtain social services, and didn't charge the pimp. Instead, he slept with her and passed her on to his pals on the force. Unfortunately, this is not uncommon within law enforcement agencies around the world. Recently, two (now retired) police officers were charged with running prostitution rings. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/retired-nypd-busted-running-prostitution-ring-article-1.2648274> <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/05/27/did-ex-cop-s-alleged-prostitution-ring-have-big-name-clients.html> They did so because they believed other cops would protect them."

Police abuses are an inevitable consequence of the criminalization of sex work. And one of the compelling reasons to decriminalize sex work is to remove this corrupting influence on law enforcement.

- In its recent [Policy statement](#), Amnesty International identified police abuse as one of the reasons why sex work should be decriminalized.

- New South Wales, Australia, moved to decriminalisation in 1995, because they recognized that removing police as regulators of sex work addressed police corruption.
- New Zealand decriminalized sex work in 2003, since when police no longer enforce laws against sex workers, and can work with sex workers to solve crimes such as violence.

ESPLERP has long called for the decriminalization of sex work in the USA. In March 2015, it filed a groundbreaking court case [ESPLERP v Gascon](#) arguing that California's anti-prostitution statute 647 (b) is unconstitutional. The case is largely based on *Lawrence v Texas*, the 2003 Supreme Court landmark decision that held that intimate consensual sexual conduct between adults was constitutionally protected. On May 24th ESPLERP filed a Notice of Appeal to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit - where we are confident the merits of our case will finally be recognized and we will be granted our basic human rights.

The Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project (ESPLERP) is a diverse community-based coalition advancing sexual privacy rights through litigation, education, and research.

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