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# **Sex Workers Condemn Senate Show Trial Of Backpage**

*Sex Workers Say Unconstitutional Government Pressure Forced Backpage To Disable Adult Classifieds; Will Make Sex Workers Far Less Safe*

San Francisco, CA - A sex work activist group, the Erotic Service Providers Legal Education Research Project (ESPLERP), today joined sex worker rights groups and civil rights organisations in condemning yesterday’s Senate subcommittee hearing on Backpage as the latest stage in a concerted campaign of unconstitutional government bullying, which has now forced Backpage to self censor adult classifieds.

“This is a show trial,” said Claire Alwyne of ESPLERP. “The Senate subcommittee had already published its report accusing Backpage of facilitating trafficking before it heard from witnesses. If they really cared about protecting women, they would talk to sex worker organisations, who would tell them that criminalizing consenting adult sex work does nothing to prevent trafficking, but does make it much harder for sex workers to safely make a living.”

“This is just the latest attempt to shut down online sex work advertising,” said Maxine Doogan, President of ESPLERP. “It will not stop sex work. All it will do is make sex workers less safe and vulnerable to violence and extortion. In effect, the US Government is jeopardising the lives of sex workers to boost their political careers. All Americans should be disgusted.”

The courts have repeatedly ruled in favor of Backpage, including the Supreme Court’s [decision](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/high-court-wont-hear-appeal-over-backpagecom-escort-ads/2017/01/09/37a0051a-d6e0-11e6-a0e6-d502d6751bc8_story.html?utm_term=.3b05240f8381) on Monday to leave in place a lower court ruling that federal law shields Backpage from liability for the content of classifieds. But the US Senate is apparently oblivious to the law, and has been intent on finding extrajudicial ways to pressure Backpage to disable adult classifieds.

Underpinning all this is the criminalization of prostitution. ESPLERP has mounted a ground breaking lawsuit, [ESPLERP v Gascon](http://esplerp.org/case3-esplerp-vs-gascon/), which challenges California’s anti-prostitution law 647(b) as unconstitutional. That case is now being appealed in the Ninth Circuit, where a long list of civil rights and LGBT organisations have filed amicus (friend of the court) briefs supporting ESPLERP’s position.

ESPLERP’s court case is mostly funded by individuals making small contributions, but our opponents (the State of California and various District Attorneys) have very deep pockets - essentially using our taxpayer dollars to deny us our rights. Contributions to support the court case can be submitted through our crowd fundraiser - [www.litigatetoemancipate.com](http://www.litigatetoemancipate.com).

*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.*

esplerp.org, decriminalizesexwork.com

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