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Sex Workers Call Out Bay Area Women Against Rape (BAWAR)

Erotic Service Providers Legal Education and Research Project (ESPLERP) says BAWAR lacks transparency, accountability, and protected abusive counselor.

San Francisco, CA - This week, the [East Bay Express detailed](#) how a mother seeking help for her vulnerable daughter turned to Patrick Mims at Bay Area Women Against Rape (BAWAR), a federal award winning anti sex trafficking agency. But then Mims used his professional position to engage in a sexual relationship - which even BAWAR recognizes as a form of sexual assault. The mother subsequently made a police complaint, and wrote to the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, copying BAWAR's executive director. But nothing ever came of her letter or the police report. Mims was never punished, was allowed to leave BAWAR in July 2014, and he now works for the Contra Costa County Probation Department where he is again being allowed access to a vulnerable population.

The mother wasn't BAWAR's first victim. "I was assaulted and raped by a repeat predator" said Ms R. "And Oakland PD's Special Victims Unit recommended I get counseling at BAWAR. But when I met with Patrick Mims, he said that it was my fault I was raped and assaulted because I am a sex worker. He shamed me. He was clear - 'rehabilitate yourself or else'. I never went back after that session - but I'm sure I wasn't the only person he abused. But it appears there is no way to report inappropriate behavior by a rape crisis counselor."

"We wrote letters, emails and left messages with the California Emergency Management Agency and the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault about Patrick Mims's appalling behavior toward Ms R," said Maxine Doogan, President of ESPLERP. "But we got no response. In practice, state legislation like Proposition 35 creates incentives for non profits like BAWAR to tag along on police anti-prostitution sting operations to supposedly rescue trafficking victims. Then they are arrested for prostitution, and this older man acts in the capacity of a 'peer to peer counselor'. This is creepy. It is a serious conflict of interest and completely inappropriate not to mention against the public's safety."

BAWAR's IRS 990 form shows that it received over \$600K in government grants in 2014, nearly 90% of its income. And between 2009 and 2014 it took in more than \$3 million. These are significant numbers. But there is no transparency - it is almost impossible to determine where that money goes, there is no breakdown of expenses or payments to executives. And there is no oversight - such as an explicit set of professional standards, or open complaints procedures.

BAWAR, like many anti-trafficking and rape crisis organizations operates completely under the radar.

ESPLERP's [Policy Agenda](#) calls for a meaningful grievance process and expanded accountability for publicly-funded anti-prostitution, anti-trafficking groups, rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters. In particular, service recipients should be notified of the process by which they can file complaints, State records of all such complaints should be maintained and available to the public, and any non-profits which show consistently poor user satisfaction or engage in unacceptable practices should be made ineligible for public funding.

BAWAR and Patrick Mim's abuses are rooted in the criminalization of sex work. In March 2015, ESPLERP filed a groundbreaking court case [ESPLERP v Gascon](#) arguing that California's anti-prostitution statute 647 (b) is unconstitutional. And as of May 2016, ESPLERP has filed Notice of Appeal to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

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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