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## **Government Seizes Backpage.com Endangering Lives of Sex Workers**

*Sex Workers Fear For Safety As Social Spaces, Advertising Platforms Shutter  
Decriminalization Needed More Than Ever*

SAN FRANCISCO — Today, the Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project (ESPLERP) issued the following statement in the wake of the federal government's seizure of popular adult site, Backpage.com

"Today's seizure of Backpage is a government shutdown of the 1st amendment rights of consensual sex workers. The government has again invaded our private lives and those of our clients, taking the United States another step deeper into totalitarianism. Their moral crusade to save us is being done against our will, and is putting our lives in incredible danger," said Maxine Doogan, Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project.

The widespread anti-sex work crackdown that we predicted under SESTA/FOSTA has begun, and the bill hasn't even been signed into law.

Even before the passage of SESTA/FOSTA, sex workers saw the closure of several important networks that provide support and sustenance: subreddits where we communicate were the first to go; followed soon after by the closure of CityVibe, an important advertising platform used to meet clients safely; followed by the closure of the Craigslist Personals section. None of these spaces had been accused of facilitating sex trafficking. However the risk of potential liability under SESTA/FOSTA meant that these corporations are now unwilling to take the risk of allowing even what we believe to be constitutionally protected sex work a safe space or a voice.

While SESTA/FOSTA await the signature of the President to be signed into law, we cannot stress enough, that it is more important than ever that sex work be decriminalized. Our recent lawsuit, [ESPLERP v Gascon](#) [case #16-15927], seeks establish a right to sexual privacy - whereby consenting adults can enter into private arrangements, which may involve payment, without fear of prosecution. That would allow sex workers who face harassment, assault, theft, trafficking, or other crimes to get the same justice as any other worker. It would also stop law enforcement arresting consensual sex workers and our clients. And decriminalization would

help all workers more freely exchange information and resources, which can literally mean the difference between life and death.

We stated previously, there were already plenty of federal and state laws to address forced labor. The government didn't need the provisions in #FOSTA or #SESTA to seize Backpage.com Our workers are now panicking, worried about their food, rent, and physical safety - and they shouldn't be.

Sex workers will die because of this recent move by federal government. The politicians that campaigned for #FOSTA and #SESTA and the celebrities who stumped for it, played a huge role in erasing our voices, now have blood on their hands. We seriously questions their commitment to fight against sex trafficking and we call on them to support our fight to decriminalize sex work.

*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. Contributions to support the court case can be submitted through our crowd fundraiser - [www.litigatetoemancipate.com](http://www.litigatetoemancipate.com).*

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