Honorary Sex Worker And Presidential Candidate Kamala Harris Comes Out In Favor Of Decriminalization Of Sex Work-For Some

Sex Workers Call Foul Given Her Track Record; Demand Apology And Reparations As Evidence Of Good Faith

San Francisco, CA - A sex work activist group, the Erotic Service Providers Legal Education And Research Project (ESPLERP), is not impressed today to hear presidential candidate Kamala Harris in an interview with The Root (http://tinyurl.com/yy2kgo5t) say that she is now open to the decriminalization of sex work-for some.

“Given her history, we need to know what Kamala Harris really believes,” said Maxine Doogan of ESPLERP. “At one point in the interview she sounds like an old school anti-prostitutist from the 80s - using epithets like “pimps” and “johns”. Then she says she is open to decriminalization of sex work. She needs to clarify her position - starting with an unequivocal statement that she supports the decriminalization of sex work for all consenting adults.”

Harris has a decidedly mixed history on sex work...

- In 2007, when running for reelection San Francisco District Attorney, Harris sought the endorsement of the Harvey Milk Democratic Club, and described herself in a public meeting as “an honorary sex worker”.
- In 2008, Harris campaigned against Prop K, a city wide ballot measure to stop the criminalization of prostitution. This was despite the San Francisco Democratic County Central Committee official position was in favor. During that campaign she made ludicrous claims that decriminalizing prostitution would open San Francisco to serious crimes like rape, robbery, extortion, kidnapping and murder (http://tinyurl.com/y5vw9oxs).
- As San Francisco District Attorney Harris was found in violation of San Francisco’s open government law. The Sunshine Ordinance Task Force found that she had not responded to defense attorney requests for disclosure, for example about police disciplinary records, in cases prosecuted by her office against sex workers.
- As California Attorney General, Harris used the power of her office to go after Backpage - an online advertising platform where sex workers could advertise and negotiate without
police harassment. When her first lawsuit against Backpage was dismissed, she filed again, making her attack on Backpage part of her US Senate campaign.

- Also while California Attorney General, Harris declined to investigate Bay Area police departments, despite their long history of exploiting and extorting sex workers, and despite the ongoing scandal of police interactions with an Oakland underage sex worker.
- In the Senate, Harris voted for the FOSTA bill which shut down online platforms used by sex workers for advertising, support and sustenance, in effect stripping sex workers of our online speech rights.

“Kamala Harris will say anything popular to get an endorsement or get elected,” said Claire Alwyne of ESPLERP. “She is good with empty words about protecting women, but her actions have consistently harmed sex workers - mostly poor women, women of color, and trans women. For example, her attacks on Backpage and her vote to pass #FOSTA forced sex workers back onto the streets, where they are vulnerable to violence and extortion. So if Harris is really sincere about decriminalization, she should start with a detailed policy position making it clear that she supports the full decriminalization of sex work for all consenting adults - and rejects the Nordic Model criminalization of our clients which has been discredited by Amnesty International ([http://tinyurl.com/kvafj88](http://tinyurl.com/kvafj88)).”

“Kamala Harris should apologize - and then start talking about reparations for sex workers,” said Reada Wong of ESPLERP. “Is she going to work to repeal FOSTA? How does she propose to compensate the sex workers her actions have harmed, who were pushed into poverty, who lost their housing or child custody? How does she propose to expunge the criminal records of the sex workers prosecuted on her watch? Will she be returning campaign contributions she’s received from anti-prostitution groups? And will she find funding for pro sex work groups like ESPLERP, so we can start dismantling decades of stigma and discrimination in State and Federal legislatures that politicians like her have furthered their careers on? Harris should put her money where her mouth is.”

*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. Support us at [www.litigatetoemancipate.com](http://www.litigatetoemancipate.com). esplerp.org, decriminalizesexwork.com

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