

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Feb. 11, 2019**

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## **Sex Workers And Supporters Applaud Protection Bill SB233**

*Sex Workers and Supporters Applaud New Legislative Proposal Which Protects Individuals Reporting Serious Crime From Being Charged With Prostitution*

SAN FRANCISCO — The Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project (ESPLERP) applauds California Senator Scott Wiener for proposing changes to legislation that would protect anyone reporting a serious crime (such as sexual assault, trafficking, robbery, assault, ...or other violent crime) from being charged with prostitution under California Penal Code 647.

Senator Weiner's legislation advances women's rights. It protects all women regardless of what they do for a living or how they conduct their personal sex lives. In this age of #MeToo, we simply cannot continue to punish women for being assaulted and raped. Only one of other state, Alaska has passed a similar version of this protection bill in 2017.

The long-standing criminalization of prostitution creates an environment that is exploited by criminals - and by sexual predators who explicitly target sex workers. For example, Gary Ridgway, the "Green River Killer", who may have killed more than 70 women, murdered prostitutes because "nobody would miss them" - and he knew that the police didn't care.

This legislation will make it easier for people like Reada Wong and Veronica Monet to report violence - and encourages the police to take assaults against sex workers seriously.

"I was violently assaulted by a predator who targeted prostitutes in 2012," said Reada Wong. "When I went to police, they were initially supportive. But when they found out that I was a prostitute, they lost interest, demeaned me, and threatened to charge me. And then, much later, when the guy was finally charged, he plead guilty. If the police and district attorney had a done their jobs when I reported the assault, the predator wouldn't have still been out there to assault other women."

"I was raped by a client in 2001," said Veronica Monet. "I wasn't his first victim nor his last. In fact, his house had bars on all the doors and windows and there was no way to exit the

premises without a key. Once inside I was trapped with a 350 pound man who was obviously capable of brutal violence. Three weeks after he raped me, he stabbed a young woman in the face when she resisted. I along with other activists were sharing information online so we knew he was a dangerous serial rapist. We knew his name, how he operated, and where he lived. But when I reported my rape to the Oakland Police Department they did nothing. In fact, they wanted to arrest me for getting raped because I admitted that I was a prostitute. After three years and after working with several women's organizations to apply pressure on then Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown to take my deposition, I was finally allowed to report this rape without threat of being arrested myself. However, the police made no attempt to contact this violent predator's other victims, and he was neither questioned or apprehended. As a result, he is still out there to this day, and remains a serious threat to the safety of all women."

"It is for this reason that I am very pleased to support this new legislation which enables prostitutes to report rape and assault without fear of being arrested," Monet concluded.

"This legislation has been a long time coming", said Maxine Doogan of ESPLERP. "Especially in light of the recent disaster for the sex trade workers in the wake of the passing of Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTAT), passed in April of 2018 which leaves so many vulnerable. So we applaud Senator Scott Wiener for taking this public safety issue seriously, because if they get away with victimizing us, it'll embolden them to target any member of the public."

*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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