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Sex Workers Say: Columbus Vice Squad - A Whole Barrel Of Bad Apples?
Sex Workers Condemn Yet Another Vice Unit Harassing And Assaulting Sex Workers; Call For Immediate Decriminalization Of Sex Work

San Francisco, CA - Sex worker activist group, the Erotic Service Providers Legal Education and Research Project (ESPLERP), today noted that a federal grand jury unsealed a seven count indictment against a Columbus Ohio Vice cop, Andrew Mitchell, who is charged with kidnapping women "under the guise of an arrest" and forcing victims "to engage in sex for their freedom". The charges appear to be related to an ongoing investigation by an FBI Task Force into the Columbus PD's Vice Unit.

“This is what the criminalization of prostitution does - corrupt cops,” said Maxine Doogan of ESPLERP. “The Columbus PD will claim Mitchell is a single 'bad apple', but 'rape by cop' is baked into the structure of how cops police prostitution. This is just the tip of the iceberg. You can look forward to more cases like this in police departments nationwide.”

Many sex workers do sex work to survive or support their families. The criminalization of prostitution doesn’t address our material needs, and makes us vulnerable to violence. Even though police brutality and harassment of sex workers is commonplace, society generally turns a blind eye. In a 2008 survey (https://tinyurl.com/yxrblrz9), nearly 20% of sex workers who were approached by police were asked for sex by the officer. In 2017, as many as 30 Bay Area law enforcement officers had sex with a teenage prostitute, some while she was still a minor (https://tinyurl.com/yxv8orwn). In 2018, two trans sex workers reported that officers in DC and Prince George’s County were using the threat of arrest to coerce them into having sex (https://tinyurl.com/y27w4s8x).

“The problem here is the criminalization of sex work - which encourages corruption in police departments,” said Reada Wong of ESPLERP. “Nobody will be safe until sex work is decriminalized, and cops can’t exploit sex workers or their clients under the guise of enforcing bad laws.”

Police should not be wasting time arresting adults engaged in consensual sexual activities. ESPLERP applauds the efforts of Decrim NY in New York State (https://www.decrimny.org/) and DECRIMNOW DC in Washington DC (https://www.decrimnow.org/) to decriminalize sex work. And encourages legislators in all 50 states to follow suit and decriminalize sex work immediately for the public’s health and safety.

ESPLERP is a diverse community-based coalition advancing sexual privacy rights through litigation, education, and research. Support us at www.litigatetoemancipate.com, esplerp.org, decriminalizesexwork.com

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