



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - March 17, 2021**

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## **Sex Workers Offer Condolences to the Atlanta Massage Parlor Community - and Condemn All Violence Against That Community**

*Sex workers offer heartfelt condolences to the families and community of the massage parlor workers who were killed while doing their job - and condemn the long-standing state and media violence against that community.*

San Francisco California — The Erotic Service Providers Legal Education and Research Project (ESPLERP) today reacted to the Atlanta Massage Parlor Murders yesterday by offering heartfelt condolences and support to everybody in the massage parlor worker community - whether an owner, worker or client.

“I started out in the industry by working in massage parlors,” said Maxine Doogan, President of ESPLERP. “I found a community there which supported me, taught me my trade, and taught me how to stay safe. So I feel so much sadness reaching out in this situation. I feel for the families and friends of everybody gunned down in Atlanta while simply trying to make a living.”

If you are a massage parlor worker, a family member or friend of a massage parlor worker, and you want to talk about the events in Atlanta, then please call 833-433-2746 (toll-free). We have been flooded with calls from concerned workers this morning. We are here for you.

“This violence doesn’t happen in a vacuum,” said Claire Alwyne of ESPLERP. “Massage parlors have been long targeted by politicians, the media, law enforcement and religious zealots as ‘hotbeds’ of sex trafficking. They have been the subject of numerous unconstitutional police stings, like last year’s Florida raids, where the police characterized the massage parlor workers, many of them of Asian descent, as victims of forced labor and the owners as ‘traffickers’. After decades of anti-trafficking and anti-sex work rhetoric, it isn’t surprising that a fundamentalist took the message to heart and waged a crusade to eliminate locations he saw as ‘temptations’.”

“The women murdered yesterday were working low-wage jobs during a pandemic,” said Reada Wong of ESPLERP. “They had to work to support their families. But they did so in a climate that demonized their ethnicity and criminalized their work - and left them vulnerable to violence.”

The widespread public panic around massage parlors has been fanned by politicians and the media, and has been used to justify a xenophobic broken immigration policy and the criminalization of prostitution. Therefore we call on congress to immediately pass a national ban on the criminalization of prostitution and reform the immigration laws so as not to leave so many people’s rights in a precarious legal limbo.

*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.*

Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project (ESPLERP)

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