



New Report: Government Agencies Deliberately Misrepresent Sex Work as Terrorism and Sex Trafficking – Fueling "War on Sex Workers and Sex Trafficking Survivors"

San Francisco, CA – The Erotic Service Provider Legal Education and Research Project (ESPLERP) today released a groundbreaking report, "Prostitution as Terrorism: Fusion Centers and the War on Sex Work".

This details how US government agencies have engaged in a deliberate and methodical misrepresentation of sex work, renaming it as sex trafficking and portraying it as terrorism and a threat to national security. Based on fusion center records obtained through public records requests across ten states and through BlueLeaks, the report reveals a systematic effort to conflate distinct activities and justify expanded surveillance and criminalization of sex workers and sex trafficking survivors.

The report highlights how agencies have gradually conflated the legal definitions of sex work and sex trafficking over the last two decades through a deliberate shift in rhetoric. Fusion centers, initially created to respond to terrorism, are identified as playing a foundational role in expanding surveillance and driving this rhetorical and institutional shift. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), founded to safeguard the nation from terrorism, has expanded its mission to include combating human trafficking, asserting that commercial sex threatens national security. Documents link commercial sex to terrorism and criminal organizations that threaten national security, and the 2022 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community explicitly links trafficking to national security threats.

The report demonstrates that various forms of legal and online sex work, including platforms like OnlyFans, have been targeted and incorrectly included in these conflations. FBI reports have framed "Commercial Sex Services" and online commercial sex as part of the "sex trafficking industry," and therefore terrorism. The report also notes the use of terrorism classification to obstruct public records requests, with information about sex work being withheld under the Texas Homeland Security Act.

According to the report, this intentional use of "doublethink" – simultaneously holding contradictory beliefs, such as viewing all prostitutes as both victims and evil traffickers – creates an ideological space where injustices like warrantless surveillance and criminal charges against survivors go unchallenged. This deliberate false portrayal manufactures moral panic, endangers sex workers and survivors, misuses federal dollars, redirects local police resources, and violates citizens' privacy rights and body autonomy.

"It's terrifying to see how the "incel state's" obsessive voyeurism and surveillance of our community has escalated to framing sex workers and sex trafficking survivors as being involved in terrorism," said Tara Burns, the report author. "This is even more terrifying in an era when the administration is disregarding judicial orders to put people merely accused of terrorism in foreign concentration camps."

"The deliberate and methodical use of doublethink has created an ideological space where no one questions sex trafficking victims being charged federally with conspiracy to commit sex trafficking and sentenced to decades on the sex offender registry or police getting handjobs before 'rescuing' sex workers by arresting them," states the Report.

The report concludes that the relentless surveillance by fusion centers is not primarily about law enforcement but is an "obsessive ritual of control" that reinforces social and economic hierarchies.

"We call for a complete decriminalization of prostitution to prevent the surveillance, public stigmatization of, and discrimination against sex workers and our clients," states one of the Report's ten policy recommendations aimed at increasing transparency, accountability, and protecting civil liberties.

Press Conference Details:

Members of the press are invited to attend a live Zoom press conference to hear directly from the Report's authors and learn more about its findings and policy recommendations.

Date: Tuesday, May 27, 2025

Time: 1:00 PM PST / 4:00 PM EST

Platform: Zoom – Link will be provided upon RSVP at
(https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ildgprY_T6eNEqUw6hpUtQ)

About ESPLER Project, Inc.:

The Erotic Service Provider Legal Education and Research Project (ESPLER) is a California-based advocacy nonprofit working towards the decriminalization of sex work. ESPLER's work advances worker rights, consumer privacy rights, and sexual privacy rights through outreach, research, and legal advocacy.

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