

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sex Workers Condemns East Palestine Police's Misallocation of Public Resources and Press Shaming

San Francisco — The Erotic Service Providers Legal Education and Research Project (ESPLER Project) strongly condemns the East Palestine Police Department of Columbiana County, Ohio for its disgraceful misuse of public resources to defraud consenting adults by "catfishing". Over the weekend, this police department deployed scarce public resources to orchestrate a prostitution sting operation under the guise of rescuing victims, resulting in the high-profile arrest of a major league sports team owner - whose name we do not find it ethical to repeat. This focus on policing consensual private behavior is a shocking misallocation of community resources, especially for East Palestine's own residents, who continue to suffer from the devastating, long-term health and environmental effects of the February 2023 Norfolk Southern toxic train derailment. Recent peer-reviewed research indicates that residents are still experiencing chronic inflammation and altered cell counts as their immune systems struggle to fight off toxic chemical exposures from a disaster that emitted dioxin levels up to 14 times higher than safe federal limits. The city of East Palestine should be focused on the community's critical safety needs for health recovery rather than targeting private adult interactions.

Furthermore, ESPLER Project admonishes the press for sexually shaming adults for what our organization considers legally protected private activity. Media outlets have sensationalized the personal details of those swept up in these stings, as seen in the public embarrassment directed at one of the owners of the San Francisco 49ers after he arranged a consensual transaction on a website. Despite the arrest, the charge was quickly amended to misdemeanor disorderly conduct, yet the media has continued to disclose his personal family matters. "We must stop treating consensual, private adult transactions as public spectacles," Maxine Doogan of the Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project said. "The press's coverage only fuels unnecessary moral panic and public mockery. It does nothing to improve public safety, but instead invades personal privacy and demeans basic human dignity."

Finally, ESPLER Project warns that naming individuals in the press who have been arrested but not convicted of misdemeanor prostitution charges can result in a devastating "social death". Being publicly named and shamed can permanently block individuals from accessing safe housing, securing stable employment, and can interfere with parental custody issues. Because losing access to basic life necessities like housing, employment, and child custody is not part of the statutory punishments for prostitution cases, these severe collateral consequences effectively constitute cruel and unusual punishment. We call on the East Palestine Police Department as well as other police agencies to end these destructive sting operations and the sensationalized reporting that inflicts extrajudicial, life-destroying punishments on consenting adults.

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