

HB 431
Opponent Testimony
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Ohio
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Good afternoon, Chairman Lang, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in opposition to House Bill 431.

Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Ohio is a statewide organization of people organizing to undermine white support for white supremacy. We believe that racism functions systemically in all of our society's institutions, and that racial justice should be central to making every policy decision. Legislation such as House Bill 431 unjustly targets people who engage with sex work and are already pushed to the margins of society.

We oppose HB 431 in its intent to create a database of people who hire sex workers and thereby criminalize them. Criminalizing people who purchase sex or people who do sex work does not make sex workers safer. The research tells us this and sex workers tell us this based on their lived, professional experience.

The creation of this database will harm the economic prosperity of sex workers, many of whom choose sex work as their profession because more mainstream forms of employment are inaccessible to them, for reasons like having a felony record. Unless we are able to offer viable alternatives to making a livelihood, the government should not be policing and jailing people for trying to make ends meet in whatever way they are able or want to.

Issues of discrimination, stigmatization, and abuse experienced by white sex workers are magnified for sex workers of color, as they are more likely to experience racial profiling from law enforcement, police violence, and incarceration as a result of their paid work. Incidents of racial profiling and police violence are traumatizing and life-threatening, and also affect sex workers' capacity to provide for themselves and their loved ones.

Spending Ohioans' tax dollars on creating and maintaining a database of people who purchase sex work would be a disservice to fostering safety and public health in our communities. Pursuing legislation that decriminalizes sex work would enable more funding for basic needs like housing, transportation, and food to flow into our communities. These are things that all people deserve no matter what type of work they are engaged in.

As an organization of individuals who are invested in ending white supremacy throughout Ohio, we oppose HB 431 and any measures that criminalize people who engage in sex work.

Sincerely,
Andrea Reany
Southeast Ohio Organizer
Showing Up for Racial Justice Ohio