HB 431: Opponent Testimony
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November 18th, 2020

Chair Eklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opponent testimony for HB 431. I would have liked to offer this testimony in person, however I have a compromised immune system and could not chance exposure to COVID-19 in a setting that has taken minimal efforts to protect the public.

My name is Blyth Barnow, I serve as the Harm Reduction Faith Manger for Faith in Public Life in Ohio. Faith in Public Life is a network of clergy who are united in the prophetic pursuit of the common good.

I have offered opponent testimony for this bill previously. I am here again asking you not to pass this dangerous and ineffective legislation. At this point you have heard from multiple offices that such a database is not in alignment with evidence based practices and is unlikely to create any positive change, but will in fact make conditions far more dangerous for those engaged in the sex trade. In this time where Ohioans on the margins are already at increased risk, we must offer true support and protection not increased criminalization and surveillance.

As faith leaders we know that shame and increased criminalization do nothing to make our communities safer. Instead it puts those most marginalized at higher risk by pushing them farther into isolation and fear. It is for these reasons that we offer opponent testimony for HB 431 and ask you not to pass this legislation.

This legislation will not increase the safety of people engaged in sex work or human trafficking survivors. In fact it will do just the opposite. When clients are threatend people who do sex work are put at higher risk. Often being forced, by circumstance or coercion, to work more frequently and in deeper isolation without protective measures they were once able to implement.

We have seen that increased surveillance and contact with the state does not aid in the recovery of people navigating substance use. Instead we know that peer led support, increased connection, and access to services are the most successful tools in supporting people who use drugs. The same is true here. To increase their safety people engaged in sex work need more choices, not less. This database does nothing to increase the protection of sex workers or human trafficking survuiors.

As faith leaders we reject false moralism and demand meaningful action that would actually serve to protect the children of God. Policies such as these are often cloaked in well meaning concern, which often simply amounts to a distorted version of christian morality that costs women and workers their safety and their lives.

HB 431 may be rooted in such good intentions but it does not reflect the on the ground reality of people engaging in sex work. The sacred lives of those engaged in sex work cannot be boiled down to oversimplified metaphors about supply and demand. The sex trade and the reasons people engage it are far more complicated than that.

If the true measure of success for legislation such as this is the increased safety and well being of people in the sex trade, then let us direct the time and funds that would be used on this dangerous and ineffective database towards offering women with little economic opportunity under our current system better choices.

We do not support people enganged in sex work by making their job more dangerous. We support them by increasing their access to safety, support, and choice.

The bottom line is that this database would endanger women and disproportionately impact vulnerable workers who are migrants, transgender, and/or people of color. If you care about violence against women, immigrant justice, workers rights, or economic sustainability then please do not pass HB 431.

Thank you again for this opportunity to offer testimony against HB 431. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

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