I am here as an advocate for sex workers’ rights, with almost ten years of working with people who sell sex, including victims and survivors of trafficking into the sex trade. If I can leave you with anything, it is that actions that harm sex workers equally harm victims of force and exploitation in the sex industry.

Anti-trafficking approaches often target sex workers broadly through increased criminalization and surveillance. This is both ineffective in fighting trafficking, and make sex workers more vulnerable. Last year, the United States passed the Allow States to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act, known as FOSTA/SESTA, ​and​ seized the website Backpage.com. This law expanded civil and criminal liability for websites which host advertisements for and information about the sex trade. The result of this was that websites used by sex workers shut down websites shut down preemptively, isolating and displacing sex workers. Losing these websites has increased sex workers’ exposure to violence and criminalization, and reliance on third parties.

For sex workers, the ability to advertise online increased safety, economic stability and independence from third parties. Losing these sites meant that sex workers lost economic stability. The results of FOSTA/SESTA have been increased homelessness, including for sex workers with children. Many sex workers have turned to street-based work where they face higher rates of policing and violence. Losing these sites also have reduced sex workers’ ability to screen clients for safety and negotiate for things like condom use.

With this new level of precarity, isolation and vulnerability, community members are being contacted by third parties who may exploit their vulnerability​, or clients with histories of violent or exploitative behavior. SESTA/FOSTA has put sex workers in a more vulnerable position economically and physically made them more vulnerable to trafficking.

SESTA/FOSTA is only an example of the impact of the worst of anti-trafficking approaches. We recommend that the General Recommendation include the following:

* Encourage governments to decriminalize sex work, including those purchasing sex and non-coercive third parties;
* Stop the conflation of trafficking in the sex trade with all sexual exchange or sex work;
* Include measures to reduce the vulnerability of and improve the quality of life for marginalized communities as a key trafficking prevention measure;
* assessment of the collateral consequences of legislation and policing practices in anti-trafficking efforts to sex workers and migrant women in the evaluation of anti-trafficking strategy.