

SUBJECT: Please support women and VOTE FOR the Sexual Exploitation Bill

Dear [MP's Name]

I am writing as a constituent to ask you to support Dame Diana Johnson's Sexual Exploitation Bill, which is scheduled for its second reading on Friday 29 January.

I am deeply concerned about the ongoing epidemic of male violence against women and girls (VAWG) – from harassment in the streets and online, to child sexual abuse, domestic violence, the degradation and sexual exploitation of prostitution, porn and lap dancing, and the shameful persistence of high rates of femicide.

There's a growing body of research that shows that men who are prostitution buyers are more likely than other men to rape and engage in all forms of VAWG.[1] This is not surprising because prostitution feeds men's sense of entitlement and superiority – the very attitudes that underpin VAWG. This means that if we are serious about tackling VAWG, we **must** tackle the sex industry – not only because it is inherently abusive but also because it is one of the key underlying drivers of the other forms of VAWG.

Extensive research shows that prostitution is damaging to the women involved. A meta-study conducted by the UCL Institute of Health Equity found that violence is a prominent feature of prostitution regardless of the setting, that social exclusion is the leading cause of entry, and prostitution usually deepens a woman's social exclusion.[2]

I strongly support the Nordic Model, which decriminalises those who are prostituted, while offering them high-quality support and exiting services, including genuine alternatives, and makes buying people for sex a criminal offence in order to change attitudes and reduce the demand for prostitution that drives sex trafficking.

This approach is founded on the understanding that the objectification and commodification of women in the sex industry is irreconcilable with equality between women and men. Its goal is to protect women while deterring men from buying sex.

The Nordic Model approach was first introduced in Sweden in 1999, and has since been enacted in Norway, Iceland, Northern Ireland, France, Ireland and Israel. In 2014, it was recognised as the best model to address prostitution by both the European Parliament [3] and the Council of Europe [4].

To be effective the approach must be championed at the highest level and be combined with measures to address all the factors that drive people into prostitution, and new or strengthened legislation against pimping and all forms of profiteering from other people's prostitution, including advertising and facilitation services, whether online or offline – as required by Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

A new study into the sex trade in Ireland in the light of the introduction of the Nordic Model approach there in 2017 has found promising results, while acknowledging that there is still much to do.[5] Contrary to the assertions of those who advocate for full decriminalisation, the study found no evidence that the law reform caused a surge in violence against those involved in prostitution. It did find, however, that violence is an ever-present feature of the sex trade along with the inextricable involvement of crime gangs. The Irish police support the new law and recognise that it has the potential to deter men from buying sex and therefore of leading to a positive cultural shift.

The study found evidence that women in the sex trade suffer multiple vulnerabilities and adversities and that these are compounded by the attitudes of buyers who show no concern for the women's welfare and who often demand risky acts and become aggressive when their demands are not fulfilled. The report concludes that the sex trade is highly exploitative and cannot be permitted to persist or expand, and it makes practical recommendations about how to continue to improve the implementation of the approach.

Dame Diana Johnson's Sexual Exploitation Bill aims to introduce a Nordic Model approach in England and Wales and to reduce the harm of prostitution by targeting the buyers and pimps who cause the harm while decriminalizing those who are exposed to that harm and providing them with high-quality support and alternatives.

I urge you to support the Sexual Exploitation Bill and to push for a well thought through Nordic Model approach in the UK and all the associated holistic measures that are required for its success.

Yours sincerely

[Full name]

[Address]

[Postcode]

[1] <http://nordicmodelnow.org/facts-about-prostitution/fact-buying-sex-makes-men-more-prone-to-violence-against-women/>

[2]

http://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/303927/A_Review_of_the_Literature_on_sex_workers_and_social_exclusion.pdf

[3] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2014-0071_EN.html

[4] <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20716>

[5] http://www.ucd.ie/geary/static/serp/Shifting_the_Burden_Report.pdf