

News Release Communiqué

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ADVOCATES CALL ON PROVINCIAL LEADERS TO RESIST DEADLY LAW, END VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS

TORONTO, December 17, 2014 — Today, on the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, sex workers and their allies want to send a strong message to Canada's provincial leaders: Reject the federal government's toxic new law governing sex work. Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne has already expressed her "grave concern" that the law, brought into force December 6th, will not make sex workers any safer, and the province's Attorney-General is assessing its constitutional validity. Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC), Maggie's - Toronto Sex Workers' Action Project, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, COUNTERfit Women's Harm Reduction Program (South Riverdale Community Health Centre), and the publishers of Toronto weekly paper NOW Magazine are urging other premiers to follow suit and are calling on provincial attorneys-general not to enforce the deadly new law.

"This is an important day for us to remember the appalling violence suffered by our colleagues, both internationally and here in Canada," said Valerie Scott, legal coordinator of SPOC. "Sex workers have been abandoned by their own federal government with this new law. If our leaders truly care about making sex workers safer, they will stop criminalizing our work, our workplaces and our clients."

"In 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that several former provisions on prostitution in the Criminal Code were unconstitutional because of the harms they cause to the safety and lives of women, men and trans people who do sex work," said Richard Elliott, executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. "But instead of listening to sex workers and honouring the Supreme Court's ruling, the federal government has pushed through a law that largely replicates the same harms and even adds new sweeping criminal prohibitions. We call upon provincial attorneys-general not to be complicit in this legislative violence against sex workers, and today some 190 legal experts Canada-wide have told Ontario's Premier and Attorney-General that they, too, are deeply concerned that this misguided new law will trample the human rights of sex workers."

"Sex workers are currently living in constant uncertainty, and our lives, safety and security are left in the hands of the government. We are terrified and exhausted from the daily fears of arrest and constant deaths in our community," said Arlene Jane Pitts, coordinator of the COUNTERfit Women's Harm Reduction Program. "I am deeply afraid

of the violence that will continue to be reinforced through this new law that will ultimately cost the lives of those we love.”

“Canada has suffered an epidemic of violence against sex workers,” said Jean McDonald, executive director of Maggie’s Toronto. “Premier Wynne, Attorney-General Meilleur and their provincial counterparts need to demonstrate their commitment to ending this epidemic. Given the serious harms at stake, they must act to ensure that prosecutions are not pursued while the constitutionality of the new law is in question.”

In the meantime, sex workers must be able to pursue their livelihood. The new law aims to silence sex workers by restricting their ability to advertise their services online or in print. But the publishers of NOW Magazine in Toronto have announced that the free weekly magazine will continue to allow advertising from independent sex workers. “We have always refused to discriminate against sex work and sex workers,” said editor/CEO Alice Klein. “Advertising offers a much safer and more secure way to connect and do business with clients. The law’s provisions around advertising actually encourage further stigmatization and violence against sex workers.”

To view the open letter from legal experts in Canada to Premier Wynne, and its 190 signatories, please www.aidslaw.ca/sexwork.

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