

To: Toronto City Council's Economic and Social Development Committee

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As a sociologist, my research for almost three decades has focused on human trafficking and the global sex industry. Research and studies in Canada and world-wide show that there are number of complications with the way that anti-trafficking policies and laws are formed and implemented. For one, there are varying ways that human trafficking is understood. For some, it means all prostitution or sex work (often called sex trafficking), for others, only forced sex work; for some it requires crossing borders (as in the UN Protocol), for others, such as in Canada, it can also be domestic. In other cases, it is understood as all forced or debt-bonded labour, or it is used to refer to the movement of refugees and migrants fleeing war, political violence, ethnic conflict, or poverty. It is used to talk about prison labour, and some include organized begging, street vending or organ trading. Recent research by Katrin Roots documents how in Ontario, there are even differences in understandings between Crown attorneys, judges, defence lawyers and the police. This has serious implications for how trafficking cases are identified and prosecuted. Second, there is a lack of empirical evidence and very imprecise statistics, as these depend on who and what is being counted – all forced workers or just sex workers? Street vendors, refugees, or prisoners? Further, the policies, laws and interventions often end up harming those they were intended to help, particularly, Indigenous, racialized and migrant sex workers, and youth. In a recent policy brief I worked on with various community organizations, graduate students and academic researchers, we reviewed research in Canada on human trafficking. The brief is easily accessible and discusses some of these impacts of anti-trafficking policies and interventions, concluding with a set of recommendations that centre the experiences, rights and humanity of persons living and working in precarious situations. See here: <http://cfr.info.yorku.ca/challenging-trafficking-in-canada-policy-brief/>. Recent doctoral dissertations by Elya Durisin, Nicole McFadyen and Katrin Roots at York University also provide ample evidence that the development and enforcement of anti-trafficking policies, programs and laws have been more harmful than beneficial for vulnerable populations, especially migrant sex workers and racialized youth, in Ontario and the rest of Canada.

It is good to see the City staff report making a distinction between human trafficking and sex work, given that to date trafficking has narrowly been understood in Ontario as sex trafficking. We cannot overlook, for example, the super-exploitative conditions for migrant workers on farms in southern Ontario as described in the TVO documentary *Migrant Dreams*, <https://www.tvo.org/video/documentaries/migrant-dreams-feature-version> or ignore the fact that without access to permanent residence status, many migrants in Canada lack protections at work. The sex industry, holistic centres or body-rub



parlours cannot be the only places to focus anti-trafficking efforts. Indeed, as the staff report also notes, a conflation of trafficking and sex work leads to greater vulnerability for sex workers and undermines their well-being and safety. This Committee would therefore do well to keep the distinction between trafficking and the sex industry at the forefront of its work on this matter and to remember that there is no data showing a greater prevalence of force, violence or exploitation in the sex industry than in other sectors. This means also that any strategies to address trafficking must also take into account experiences of survivors and workers from sectors other than the sex industry.

I hope that after reading the City staff report, and in light of all the recent research that is available, the Committee recognizes that while human trafficking interventions in Toronto may have good intentions they are still mostly threatening and ineffective, and that im/migrant sex workers feel more intimidated than safe under the current policies and laws. These workers are by and large distrustful of the police and anti-trafficking enforcers out of fears of more surveillance, criminalization, discrimination and stigmatization.

It is important also, that the City Council, this Committee and anyone concerned about human trafficking in Toronto ensures that programs and strategies are developed together with those who are most vulnerable to force, violence and coercion, especially im/migrant sex workers, migrant workers, Indigenous women, and youth. The City should not be relying on more repressive laws, increased policing, or a moral panic about sex work. It is also imperative to listen to, consult and work closely with, organizations such as Butterfly, the Worker's Action Centre, and Maggie's – organizations that already have trustful relationships with vulnerable workers - to ensure anti-trafficking programs and interventions protect the well-being, rights and safety of those workers.

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