



May 27th, 2019

To: Economic and Community Development Committee, City of Toronto

Re: “Supporting Survivors of Human Trafficking” from the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

Deputation by Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network)

Good Afternoon,

I am Elene Lam, the Executive Director of Butterfly, the Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network. I have been working on issues of human rights, violence against women, and the rights of sex workers and migrants for more than 20 years.

Butterfly is organized by and supports workers in holistic centres, body rub parlours and the sex industry in Toronto. We have contacted more than 2000 workers in the last five years. We are defenders of the safety and human rights of the sex workers. We are working with the community to stop violence and exploitation, including trafficking. We are glad that the City is concerned about the safety and human rights of workers. We are experts on which policies around human trafficking are helpful and which are harmful, and are open to working with the City to develop strategies to protect the wellbeing of workers.

We are appreciative of the City staff who are working with the sex work community and listening to their concerns. We support the aspects of the staff report which highlight the importance of differentiating between sex work and trafficking, because we know that conflating the two increases surveillance, stigmatization and criminalization of sex workers, endangering their health and safety, and violating their rights. We also appreciated that the City prioritized the safety, wellbeing and human rights of people and is trying to avoid increasing the vulnerability of sex workers.

The City should not only support sex workers but also other migrant and vulnerable workers. Some of the Butterfly’s members told us that they were exploited not in the sex industry but in their work in factories, in restaurants, as caregivers, and so on.

One worker told us:

“Before I work in this business (sex industry). I worked 12 hours per day and my hourly rate was only \$7 in a factory...I have better income now. I am not trafficked victim. I want to have my privacy and don't want to get in any trouble. No matter they are friendly or not, I don't want City staff or law enforcement come to my place.”

Consider other privacy issues. Would you want a police officer to knock on your door, without prompting, to ask if you are abused by your partner? Would you want your financial stability and sense of safety to be put at risk just because they assume you are vulnerable? You wouldn't, because that would only increase your risk of being abused.

Of course, it is important to consider how to reach out to the people who are marginalized or at risk of trafficking and help them to access services and supports. However, having City staff and law enforcement reach out in their workplaces would be intimidating and unhelpful. It will increase fear and surveillance, and this unwanted contact will push the workers underground and increase their vulnerability.

So what can the City do? Instead of taking a harmful and ineffective approach, the City should cooperate with workers' organizations that have already built trusting relationships with and are able to reach out to marginalized workers. By working with these organizations, you can help to develop effective strategies to help workers access support and information. There are a number of workers' organizations — such as Maggies, Butterfly, Workers Action Centre, and Grocery Store Workers' Project — who have already organized workers and established trusting relationships, and who have the cultural sensitivity and language skills needed to effectively reach out those who are marginalized and isolated. For example, Butterfly has reached out to more than 500 migrant sex workers each year to help the workers access health, legal and social services — for example, we refer them to legal clinics, violence against women organizations, health services and shelters as needed. We are working with community members to develop safety plans to stop or leave exploitative or violent situations. We also have a project supported by the City that allows sex workers to reach out to other sex workers to provide support and information.

For sex workers, repressive laws, discriminatory or excessive law enforcement, and stigma are major barriers to accessing support and services. Therefore, we urge the City to adopt a non-discriminatory approach with all individuals engaged in the sex industry. The City should also adopt an equitable approach to trafficking and to all other City initiatives and services, treating those in the sex industry with dignity and without prejudice. The City should involve the People, Equity and Human Rights division in these processes to ensure that the City of Toronto's anti-trafficking policies apply a human rights lens, and a non-discriminatory approach to ensure those measures are not racist, classist or sexist.

This City should uphold the Access T.O. policy passed in 2013 to ensure that Torontonians, regardless of immigration status, have access to City services without fear of being asked for proof of status.

Today we are proposing a few small but critical changes to the recommendations that staff have presented to you which you should have in front of you in writing as an appendix to my statement. Please see the last page of my written submission where we have put in bold our proposals.

We would like to continue work with the City's social development staff to develop an effective approach to achieve our shared goals of ensuring the safety, wellbeing and human rights of all the people and workers in Toronto and of avoiding harm to sex workers and other marginalized communities.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Elene Lam

Executive Director

Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network)

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Appendix: Recommended Amendments

Butterfly and our allies support the following amendments (in **bold**) to recommendations made by the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration.

1. City Council direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, and the Executive Director Municipal Licensing and Standards, in collaboration with the Medical Officer of Health, and in consultation with community members, **including sex workers, migrant workers and human trafficking survivors**, to develop an outreach model and determine an appropriate pilot strategy ~~for reaching workers in workplaces in which people may be at risk of human trafficking or other vulnerabilities related to sex work~~ for the purpose of building trusting relationships, providing support and referrals to relevant services, and informing workers of their rights.

3. City Council direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to coordinate the distribution of posters regarding the human trafficking helpline(s), **and the Access to City Services for Undocumented Torontonians (Access T.O.) policy**, to all relevant and interested City Agencies, Corporations and Divisions, including Toronto Employment and Social Services, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Children's Services, Toronto Public Library, and Toronto Community Housing.

6. City Council direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, to ensure that all efforts to address human trafficking align with the City of Toronto's Access to City Services for Undocumented Torontonians (Access T.O.) policy, which ensures that Torontonians, regardless of immigration status, have access to City services without fear of being asked for proof of status.

7. City Council direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to consult with Executive Director, People, Equity and Human Rights, to ensure that City of Toronto anti-human trafficking policies, training modules and outreach models apply a human rights lens, and a non-discriminatory approach.