

ANSWER SOCIETY

Advocacy Normalizing Sex Work through Education and Resources Society
Non-Profit Society in Edmonton, Alberta

February 6, 2022

Kind members,

SUBJECT: Repeal PCEPA

In 1985, prostitution laws changed in Canada. The Zones of Tolerance in Edmonton were eliminated. We were no longer welcome to work on the street with other workers who would take the licence plate numbers of clients who's cars we had entered. This small ritual kept the anonymity out of the transaction. The clients knew they had been seen.

Around this time, abolitionist societies began to organize, vilifying us as they did, and we began to hide, moving to alley ways, dispersing in various directions, more afraid of the police than we were the potential of violence or death by predators.

Pressure was mounting from abolitionist groups and community leaders to stop sex work in its tracks; the laws scattered sex workers, who then died at the hands of murderers. In 1990, keeping with societal dictates of the day, the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a reference upholding the street soliciting law, saying eliminating prostitution is a "valid social goal". And so the rate of missing and murdered sex workers grew. To this day, only Vancouver has more recorded sex worker murders.

Our laws tell predators that we are disposable. Even the notorious Green Bay killer Gary Ridgeway was quoted as saying "I thought I was doing you guys a favor, killing prostitutes," he said. "Here you guys can't control them, but I can."

The City of Edmonton drafted and passed Adult Entertainment bylaws that largely went unenforced until 1993. When the bylaws needed refreshing, the City of Edmonton called sex workers to the table as major stakeholders and began the slow process of change. As our City Council began to hear our stories and our concerns, attitudes shifted. We did not fit the mainstream depiction of uneducated, substance-using wobegone prostitutes.

By the mid aughts, with at least two active serial killers preying on us, Edmonton took the lead, knowing full well that the Federal laws, especially those against bawdy houses, were unfair and lacked foresight. Within its harm reduction framework, the City of Edmonton took steps to encourage migration to the safety of indoor venues. Where in 1993 there were 350 outcall sex workers and only 50 incall workers; today Edmonton has approximately 300 studio workers and

only 60 outcall sex workers. The City of Edmonton puts the well-being of sex workers ahead of harmful PCEPA legislation¹.

The City of Edmonton does not charge for licencing us. Sex workers have to take a free City-organized course that educates about the rights and responsibilities workers have as independent contractors. We have regulations to follow, and in return, our work continues with minimal oversight, virtually uninterrupted and in relative safety.

The licencing measures have kept organized crime at bay. The City has found zero evidence of trafficking among its regulated brothels and agencies. There have been zero minors found in any of the licenced establishments.

PCEPA limits our ability to advertise, which makes it harder for us to find common websites that clients might migrate toward. Often this comes at a higher financial cost as we try to predict which of the websites might produce results. Just knowing that it is illegal to advertise, in spite of the exemption rule, is absolutely galling. Every other legal business can advertise but we cannot.

Edmonton's licencing requirement along with availability of internet advertising also allowed us to migrate to indoor space. The City's own statistics have shown that there is 99% compliance² with the licencing requirements. Most importantly, there have been zero murders in body rub centers since the implementation of the harm reduction (buddy system - minimum two workers present at all time) approach.

Street worker presence is very sparse in Edmonton. It does occur but with far less frequency than in other large municipalities. Although street work is high risk, the City of Edmonton has allied with several non-profit organizations to mitigate harm as much as possible.

Vilifying us didn't work, so the focus shifted to our clients - again a gift from PCEPA. From this spawned spin-off businesses of conversion therapy a.k.a. "John School"³. When caught in sting operations, clients are offered a way out of criminal charges for a fee of \$800 and a day of brainwashing where they hear over and over again how very horrible they are for thinking paid sex is consensual. They are made to be ashamed of their urges and actions.

Sex work is not for everyone but for those of us that are comfortable with our business, it has been a lifeline. We can feed ourselves without going cap in hand to the government for social assistance; we can choose our hours and our shifts to suit our lives and those of our families. It fits well for those of us when we suffer downtime from depression - something a regular job cannot offer. Those of us with physical disabilities that prevent us from working regular hours can work when they feel well. Sex workers want their voices heard. We are not in need of

¹ [BODY RUB CENTRE LICENSING RESEARCH REPORT](#)

² [Regulation Compliance In Body Rub Parlours](#)

³ [John School](#)

rescue from our jobs; we are in need of rescue from the devastatingly destructive PCEPA legislation.

PCEPA is a thoughtless regurgitation of the 1985 laws that were stricken by Canada's Supreme Court in 2013 (Bedford v Canada). Edmonton has proven that sex workers can work within the framework of well considered bylaws without Federal oversight.

Finally, this law is the highest form of misogyny. In a Country where capitalism is next to godliness, sex workers (95% of whom are women) suffer from this undignified legislation for selling what others gladly give away for free.

Please honor the High Court by scrapping PCEPA and decriminalize and destigmatize sex work in Canada once and for all.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

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ANSWERS (Advocacy Normalizing Sex Work through Education and Resources Society) was formed in 2020 with an eye toward helping our community while supporting efforts of the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform in their decriminalization and destigmatization of sex work efforts in Canada.

We are a sex worker led peer-to-peer organization that includes erotic dancers, escorts, body rub practitioners and online chat workers represented within our board membership.

ANSWERS encourages the review board to recommend repeal of PCEPA.