

Dear Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights:

Bill C-36, which became the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA), was originally presented as a law that would protect female sex workers from their abusive male clients. My name is Maxime Durocher, and I am a male escort whose only clients are women.

The above introduction makes the PCEPA's absurd paternalism immediately obvious. This moralistic stance is not only out of place, but it fails to reflect our reality even as it tries to regulate our lives. Sex work is not limited to women offering services to men; rather, it involves a variety of genders, on both the supply and demand sides.

I am a perfect inversion of the PCEPA's assumptions. I am a man providing services to women. My situation is very different from the stereotype of a woman forced to obey the every whim of treacherous men under a patriarchal system that makes her into a victim or slave.

In fact, my clients—courageous women who take their fates into their own hands—are not victims any more than are my female colleagues. Like my female colleagues, my clients claim their sexual freedom, the freedom to enjoy and control their own bodies. The PCEPA is a hypocritical creation of the patriarchy; the law uses its own existence to justify increased policing of women's bodies and even paternalistically takes away their freedom of speech by telling them they are the victims of a system that belongs to them. The PCEPA is filled with contradictions.

I immediately lost clients in June 2014 when Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government brought in Bill C-36, which was announced by then Minister of Justice Peter MacKay. And when the law came into force in December 2014, I lost nearly all those I had left. These women were afraid of the government and this law restricting their freedoms.

In 2013, I had barely earned something approaching the poverty line after two years of hard work, planning and raising awareness among women that sex workers were also available for their intimate and emotional needs.

In January 2015, I was reduced to eating peanut butter sandwiches, and I hate peanut butter. You might ask, "Why don't you find another job?" Why indeed?

Why do artists choose to tighten their belts to devote themselves to their art? They do it because it is their passion, because they want to share their talent, their freedom, their vision and their joy, and because they want to feel fulfilled. It is the same for me.

You may not understand it, but I love my work. I love helping these women, getting to know them intimately and bringing them pleasure, relief, comfort, understanding and attention; I love giving them the opportunity to be themselves, free of judgment, and to simply enjoy the moment. It brings me immeasurable happiness. I can see the significant difference my work makes in the lives of these women, and I am incredibly proud of what I do.

I feel far more fulfilled than I have in any other work. Even the plans I am trying to make for the fateful day I can no longer earn a living as a sex worker will not make me as happy; it will be a much more selfish kind of happiness.

My profession offers a service that cannot be provided by any other since no other line of work can ethically provide the same level of intimacy. We sex workers of every gender are an important part of society. Our role is to address the lack of intimacy felt by many.

But some individuals, armed with moralistic puritan values, attack us in every way possible or imaginable out of fear. Whether it is at the financial, legal or societal level, their propaganda aims to do one thing: enforce their moralistic view without regard for our health or safety. Our basic rights are violated, yet we are told it is for our own good. They treat us like children, prevent us from speaking up and refuse to listen when we do.

The cases of abuse that occur are not representative of our line of work, just like cases of child abuse do not represent the everyday experience of all children. Criminalizing all parents will not stop child abuse. The PCEPA attempts to make having a bank account illegal in the hope of eliminating tax fraud.

This law says that I can sell my services, but no one can buy them. Is a painter safe from theft when buying his paintings is made illegal? Will this convince him to stop painting? Will he not simply take greater risks to continue earning a living as a painter?

I want to earn a living from my work as an escort for women. Despite the limited demand, it is possible. I have proved as much, and I continue to work as a male escort. However, the PCEPA is a heavy burden that my clients and I are constantly forced to carry without good reason.

The PCEPA is based on puritan values, treating sex as something either evil or sacred, and leaves no room for our views, positive or even neutral. The *Criminal Code* already contains the provisions necessary to fight exploitation, sexual or not. The PCEPA is useless; it serves only to stigmatize, segregate and erase us.

We have no one to represent us in our fight against marginalization. We are a well-hidden minority, living in the shadows. We are demonized and we lack the financial capability to defend ourselves. The money raised to combat sexual exploitation is being used to target us in the hope that we will abandon our line of work. We are not the cause of exploitation any more than having a bank account is responsible for tax evasion.

Each time these sex work abolitionists strike, I need to start over. The PCEPA is not the first attack, and it will not be the last. FOSTA-SESTA (a pair of American laws) was another blow that wrecked my visibility and, consequently, my income.

These attacks will keep happening for as long as Canada's laws violate our basic rights. A lot of research has shown that the PCEPA is doing severe harm to our community, including the AESHA Project (2018), to name but one example.¹

If Canada's laws were on our side, we could start to improve our lives and reduce stigmatization. Currently, all Canadians, including law enforcement officers, can justify acts of discrimination against us by saying sex work is criminal. Attitudes—which have a direct impact on our health and safety—will never change under the current conditions. The PCEPA must be repealed to give us a chance to live free of discrimination.

Thank you,

Maxime Durocher
Escort for women

¹ *Harms of End-Demand Criminalization: Impact of Canada's PCEPA Laws on Sex Workers' Safety, Health and Human Rights*, http://www.cgshe.ca/app/uploads/2019/12/Harms_2019.12.16.v1.pdf.