

Sex Worker Rights are Human Rights

“We have chosen to advocate for the decriminalization of all aspects of consensual adult sex - sex work that does not involve coercion, exploitation or abuse. This is based on evidence and the real-life experience of sex workers themselves that criminalization makes them less safe.”

– Amnesty International

In July 2015, Amnesty International announced, that following two years of research and consultations, it would be voting to develop a policy respecting the human rights of sex workers by advocating for the decriminalization of sex work globally.

HIPS stands in solidarity with the push for decriminalization, in recognition of the rights of sex workers and the role of decriminalization in securing those rights.

Sex Worker Rights Defined

Sex workers are entitled to live free of discrimination, stigma, and violence. As all people, their rights to life, health, privacy, and bodily autonomy should not be infringed upon. Sex worker rights have generally focused on decriminalizing sex work as a tool to ensure fair treatment.

Human Rights Framework

Human rights are inalienable rights, which all people are entitled to by virtue of their status as human beings. Various international human rights principles and legal instruments have been generated through the United Nations in order to put forth state obligations to protect and honor those rights. Although the

United States has not signed and ratified most of the international human rights treaties, advocates have called for the application of a human rights framework domestically.

Importance

Folks engaged in the sex trade are faced with pervasive violence, stigma, and discrimination, which consequently limit the ways in which many sex workers navigate the world. Recognizing the rights of sex workers as human rights not only affirms the dignity and humanity of sex workers as indeed, workers but also recognizes them as human beings and rights holders beyond the context of their work. Folks in the sex trade have needs and desires outside of their occupation that we must also center and support.

The systemic oppression many sex workers encounter, and very often without legal recourse, is compounded for racial and sexual minorities, folks with histories of drug use and criminal system involvement, persons living with HIV, people from immigrant backgrounds, etc. Criminalization exacerbates marginalization and work-related safety and health hazards. Creating pathways for folks in the sex trade to assert their rights through the decriminalization of sex work can improve life outcomes and center their voices.

Applying the Framework

A rights based approach is an evidence-based approach. Research has shown that supporting sex worker rights is the best way to promote safety and health and shift law enforcement resources towards violent crime.

HIPS recognizes the agency and individual power of the populations we serve. To provide compassionate harm reduction services and advocacy, we aspire to be non-judgmental and non-coercive. We recognize that there are a variety of reasons why folks engage in the sex trade. We also recognize the harms associated with sex work due to its criminalization—laws have the power to constrain a person’s ability to survive and thrive safely.

Advancing the human rights of our clients requires us to challenge laws that criminalize their livelihoods while simultaneously challenging the lack of resources made available to sex workers and advocates. Review our *Sex Work Policies* document for more information about local laws and policies in the District of Columbia we can change to better support folks in the sex trade.



Reducing harm in the nation's capital since 1993

HIPS is a harm reduction service provider and advocacy organization providing support to persons impacted by sexual exchange and/or drug use in the District of Columbia. For more information about HIPS, visit www.hips.org.