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Sex Workers Demand Decriminalisation Now!

Sex workers and supporters are rallying again today calling on the state government to finally address their health and safety concerns by decriminalizing sex work in South Australia.

The rally will be held at Parliament house today at 1 pm and speakers include:

- Hon. Stephanie Key, Member for Ashford
- Hon. Kelly Vincent, Dignity for Disability MLC
- Sharon Jennings, South Australian Sex Industry Network (SIN)
- ARI Reid, Scarlet Alliance
- Sex Worker Action Group Gaining Empowerment Rights & Recognition (SWAGGERR)

The laws pertaining to sex work in South Australia date back to the 1930's and are the oldest in the country.

Sex workers have been fighting for basic rights for decades and say it's time the state parliament was held accountable.

"Enough stalling, the health and safety of sex workers in South Australia must be progressed as a priority!" says Ari Reid from Scarlet Alliance. "This is the seventh year in a row that sex workers have gathered on the steps of parliament house to protest the archaic and unworkable laws that are putting us at risk" she says.

Sex work is criminalised in South Australia under laws contained in the Summary Offences Act 1953 and the Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935. As a result of these laws sex workers in South Australia currently work in fear of the police, without industrial or OHS protections and are often forced to prioritise avoiding detection over utilising safety working strategies.

South Australia's approach to sex work regulation has been heavily criticised by United Nations bodies (UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNDP) and is consistently demonstrated to pose danger to sex workers human rights and safety.

In addition to putting sex workers health and safety at risk, Tarkwin Coles, President of sex worker group SWAGGERR says "Criminalising us denies us many rights, in areas such as employment contracts, insurance, banking, and housing. Even our assets may be seized as proceeds of crime, while at the same time, the national tax system demands we pay tax, it's outrageous!"

Dignity for Disability MLC Kelly Vincent who will be speaking at today's rally says "It is time for South Australia to reform its archaic laws around sex work and remove it from the criminal code. It has been 80 years since we have had any modification in this industry, so modernising our legislation to recognise sex work as work like any other, is well overdue".

Sharon Jennings, manager of the sex worker support organisation, Sex Industry Network agrees and says "South Australia has fallen behind the other states when it comes to sex work law reform; however this has given us the opportunity to learn from their experiences. Different models of sex work regulation have been used around the country but only decriminalisation has proven to deliver improved health outcomes for sex workers".

Ari Reid goes on to say "Nineteen years of decriminalisation in New South Wales and twelve years in New Zealand has brought improved work safety, high rates of safer sex practice, low rates of sexually transmissible infections, improved Occupational Health and Safety, little to no amenity impacts and no evidence of organised crime".

The Hon. Stephanie Key, Member for Ashford, introduced a bill to decriminalise sex work in South Australia last year, but unfortunately the Bill was prorogued, so was never debated or voted on.

Ms Key says "The Sex Industry can be traced back to the very early days of European settlement in SA. Call me 'Pollyanna' but I have faith that the [this] parliament will see the need for SA to modernise and decriminalise the Sex Industry".

Dignity for Disability MLC Kelly Vincent agrees and says "For the safety and wellbeing of both sex workers and their clients, it is essential we decriminalise sex work. It's also a waste of police resources to have our police officers out in the community having to enforce antiquated laws".

"We will [once again] start the campaign by holding meetings for interested MPs & MLCs about the industry so they can make informed decisions with regard to my Bill" says the Hon. Ms Key.

Sharon Jennings goes on to say "For decades, progressive, forward thinking MPs and sex worker activists have campaigned against the archaic and draconian laws which govern sex work in SA, just like sex work itself, we will not stop. Every time we get knocked down we will keep getting back up, until the government puts our health, rights and wellbeing first, and allows us the same rights as all other industries!"

Ms Reid says "We urge South Australian parliament to remove the risks that the current laws create, and to allow sex workers to access the rights and protections that every other South Australian is afforded".

For media comment please contact Sharon Jennings on 0407 725 780.