

Open letter to Scottish Ministers and MSPs

Ministers and MSPs
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh,
EH99 1SP

Sent via email

5 January 2026

Dear Scottish Ministers and MSPs

Prostitution, Offences and Support (Scotland) Bill

We write as women who have personal experience of prostitution to request your support for the Prostitution, Offences and Support (Scotland) Bill that is currently before the Scottish Parliament.

Prostitution caused us lasting emotional and physical harms, and for most of us also complex post-traumatic stress (PTSD). With 68% of women in prostitution meeting the criteria for PTSD¹—at higher rates and in more complex forms than combat veterans—and mortality rates six times higher than the general population,² we face a debate not about individual choice, but about a public health catastrophe rooted in violence against women and children.

For most of us, our pathways into selling sex followed a common and evidenced pattern of exploitation that began in childhood. Research shows that about 60% of women in prostitution have experienced childhood sexual abuse, with about 70% directly linking this trauma to their entry into the sex trade.³ Early sexual victimisation almost doubles the odds of a woman becoming involved in prostitution during her lifetime, while seeking to escape abusive homes during adolescence increases entry risk more than forty-fold.⁴ These are not coincidences; they are the predictable consequences of failing to protect women and children from violence.

Yet so often society and politicians respond with wilful blindness. We document the trauma and express outrage, but society still fails to build systems to prevent vulnerable girls being drawn or coerced into a trajectory where selling sex for ever-diminishing returns, while others make most of the profit, seems like the only way of making a living. When 90% of those in prostitution would exit if they could,⁵ when 71% report physical assault and 63% report rape since entering,⁶ we are witnessing systematic violence, not an occupation deserving of normalisation.

The absence of clear legal messaging that condemns the purchase of human beings for sex creates a permissive environment where demand flourishes unchecked and more women and girls are drawn into prostitution to satisfy it, whether that happens through deception about likely earnings, coercion, force, or years of cuts in public spending and a lack of government interest in measures to reduce poverty and provide alternative ways of making a living. Even when laws exist, they are not enforced to limit or close off entry points into prostitution. We don't interrupt the grooming, the exploitation of traumatised children, or the normalisation of male sexual entitlement.

The contrast with campaigns to address demand for drugs, or for ever cheaper goods manufactured in sweatshops, is stark. Our society itself is complicit. Ignorance is no longer defensible. Every institution, every bystander who knows these realities yet fails to act participates in maintaining conditions that feed girls and women into a system designed to consume them.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) calculated that prostitution contributed [£5.329 billion](#) to the British economy in 2016. By 2023 this had risen to [£6.269 billion](#). This reflects the increasing numbers of women becoming involved in prostitution due to their precarious circumstances, not increases in what the women can charge sex buyers relative to inflation.

In 2016 the principal investigator involved in analysing the contribution of prostitution to the UK's GDP for the ONS [estimated](#) that women in prostitution receive a mere 24% of their gross income with the remaining 76% received by third parties. Based on that ratio, profits from the prostitution of others exceeded £4.7 billion in 2023, the latest year for which data is available.

In January Nordic Model Now! published a report documenting the [social and economic costs](#) of prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. It includes case studies of women for whom the overall social and personal costs of their involvement in prostitution was over £350,000.

These are not far-fetched figures. In June the Women's Budget Group published a report estimating the wide-ranging [social and economic cost](#) of acts of sexual violence in England & Wales, including a [costing tool for calculating losses](#) through reduced productivity, long-term impacts on survivors' quality of life and loss of opportunity. The report estimates the total lifetime economic cost of sexual violence and abuse across both children and adults in England and Wales for the year ending September 2024 at over **£400 billion**. The aggregated lifetime cost to an individual of being a victim of sexual violence is estimated to be over £240,000. There are estimated to be 100,000 women currently involved in prostitution in the UK, for whom the total lifetime cost could therefore exceed £24 billion.

The research leaves no room for comfortable distance. These are not abstract statistics but documented patterns of violence against women and children that we, as a society, have created the conditions for.

Environmentalists and other campaigners rightly criticise companies whose shareholders make huge profits from activities and industries which cause serious harms that wider society has to pay huge sums to remedy. Those same campaigners are strangely silent about who profits the most from prostitution and who bears the personal, social and economic cost of it. The social, economic and personal losses caused by the normalisation of prostitution are not sustainable.

We are looking at a failure cascade that begins with our collective inability to protect children and ends with women trapped in situations they desperately wish to escape. Not to mention the impact on the families of men who buy sex, and on the families of the teenagers, and mothers trying to provide for their children, who are encouraged to sell sex because of its normalisation.

Prevention requires uncomfortable honesty. We must name the violence inherent in purchasing access to another person's body, recognise the grooming pathways that make traumatised children available for exploitation, and acknowledge that every failure to intervene becomes participation in preventable harm. The harm persists because we lack the collective will to dismantle men's demand, intervene in childhood trauma, and build effective exit pathways.

What remains is a choice: continue as bystanders to systematic violence against women and children or construct systems that genuinely prevent, protect, and prioritise their dignity and survival. This is what the Prostitution, Offences and Support (Scotland) Bill is about. It is perhaps a once in a lifetime opportunity to make a real difference. To make it clear that paying to use and abuse another human being is simply not acceptable in a modern democratic society. To start the long process of Scotland healing from the historic wrong that the prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and girls represent.

There is no neutral ground in violence. Women involved in prostitution experience [disproportionate and unique health risks](#). Buyers' choices are based on racist, sexist, ageist, ableist, and classist stereotypes about what being able to pay someone not to say "No" is worth and on myths about female sexuality. Neither the health and safety risks nor the discrimination inherent in the prostitution system would be tolerated in any other industry.

Silence is complicity. Many of us were strangled, raped and beaten during our time in prostitution. Thankfully, we survived and found our voices. After years of silence and what for many of us was a form of "trauma bonding", we are committed to using our voices on behalf all other women and children.

Yours sincerely

The undersigned prostitution survivors

1. Amanda Jane Quick. (United Kingdom)
2. C.O. (United Kingdom). I am a prostitution survivor. I know the realities of the industry as I've lived it, know why women and girls enter the industry and I understand the long-term impact. It is damaging to those involved and rooted in misogyny. Help to create a world where women and can live as equals. Where men know that buying people for sex is not ok and women have genuine opportunities and know their worth.
3. Emily (United Kingdom)
4. Esther (United Kingdom)
5. Harriet (United Kingdom). Consent isn't negotiable. If there's coercive negotiation (including monetary), that isn't actual consent. In 2025, people understand this when it comes to sexual relationships, but for some reason when it comes to "sex work" people seem OK with consent being negotiable if money changes hands. We need to think about prostitution in this context.
6. Jenna (United Kingdom)
7. Sian S (United Kingdom)
8. V A Gibson (United Kingdom)
9. Vanessa MacLeod (United Kingdom)
10. Agnieszka Dubec (Poland).
11. Agnieszka Dworek
12. Alexine Solis (France). As a survivor of prostitution, I support the movement of my sister survivors. I support the Bills that can bring an end to the system of prostitution. A French study just demonstrated that even long after leaving prostitution, the majority of us still suffer from symptoms of trauma, and that we need specialized trauma-informed care. Please, help us protect the women and girls, give us an access to better health, to tackle male demand, hold them accountable, and facilitate our opportunity to have decent jobs that are not rooted in sexual violence and discrimination. Thank you.
13. Alicia T (United States). This is imperative to change the narrative of how trafficking happens among women.

14. Amelia Tiganus (Spain)
15. Amy Merrick (United Kingdom)
16. Andrea Heinz (Canada)
17. Anna Travers (United Kingdom). At 55, I am only now beginning therapy for the complex trauma that prostitution left rooted in every part of my life. I came from a disciplined military family and, on the surface, what many would describe as “good stock.” But behind closed doors I experienced sexual and physical abuse as a child, and none of it was seen or understood by the adults who should have protected me. By the age of 17, I felt I had no choice but to leave home, and I walked into the world with a level of naivety that made me easy to exploit. What followed matches exactly what this letter describes. I was groomed into believing that the life ahead of me was survival, not harm. My children’s father became my pimp, and from there the line between choice and coercion disappeared entirely. Over the years I was subjected to extreme violence, including being left for dead, and I experienced repeated situations where men refused to pay for the “services” they demanded. In the eyes of the law that is rape. At the time, I didn’t even have the language to call it that. Normalising abuse was part of how you survived. Across 13 years, I estimate I earned around £700,000. People look at that number and think it means profit. But in reality it came from relentless pressure to work day and night, from constant danger, and from a life where stability and safety were never within reach. The income never outweighed the cost. The true cost has been lifelong trauma, the breakdown of family relationships, and the impact carried into the next generation. My children grew up in an environment shaped by fear, instability and a mother who was just trying to hold herself together. I am still rebuilding those relationships today. The damage hasn’t only been emotional or psychological. The physical injuries I suffered during those years have left me unwell in ways that I live with every day. I now have chronic conditions, including fibromyalgia, directly linked to the trauma and the physical demands of that life. This is the part society never sees: the trauma doesn’t just stay in your mind, it lives in your body. It becomes long-term disability. It limits your future. It reduces your quality of life decades after the harm has stopped. I am one of the women this system creates. The harm doesn’t end when the work ends. It stays in your body, in your mental health, in your family, and in every attempt you make to rebuild a life. The trauma is lifelong. It is intergenerational. And far too many women never get the chance to repair themselves the way I am only just beginning to try. This Bill represents more than legislation. It is a chance to stop more vulnerable young women from being pushed into a life that consumes them and leaves them paying the price in their minds, bodies and families for decades afterwards. My experience is not unusual. It is the predictable outcome of a system that fails to protect vulnerable girls and then punishes them for the consequences.

18. AR (United States)
19. Bella (United Stated)
20. Blessing (Italy)
21. Brendan (United Kingdom). Dear Scottish Parliament, I am a male survivor of prostitution and I've testified for Scottish parliament that was put forward by Linda Thompson who is the National Coordinator of the Women's Support project. I hope the government is there to protect and support survivors of prostitution by introducing the Nordic Model.
22. Bridget Perrier (Canada)
23. Cajsa Östergaard Callmer (Sweden)
24. Caroline Pugh-Roberts (Canada). Germany and Amsterdam have PROVEN LEGALISING PROSTITUTION DOES NOT WORK.
25. Chelsea Geddes (New Zealand)
26. Cherie Jimenez (United States). This bill is critical and Scotland can pave the way for other countries to finally recognize the harms of prostitution and introduce similar legislation. It is our unified voice of survivors everywhere that we call on you to pass this bill.
27. CJ (United Kingdom). Please listen to the voices of survivors and bring in the Nordic model or have blood on your hands!
28. Claudia Neely (United States). Scotland's commitment to freedom should include women and girls. This is a stand against trafficking human beings.
29. Claudia Quintero (Colombia)
30. Danit Mitchell (Israel)
31. Diane Martin CBE (United Kingdom)
32. Elena (Israel). You are an example and hope for me and for a lot of women with experience of prostitution.
33. Elizabeth Turner (United Kingdom)
34. Ellie (France). Please listen to us. The scars last a life time. I was only 22 when I was exploited. 40 years on I am still severely damaged by my experiences.

35. Eveliina T
36. Gelia Bessmertnaia (Georgia/Russia)
37. Geneviève Gilbert (Australia). Dear Members of the Scottish Parliament, TIME IS NOW! We survivors often have numerous undiagnosed health conditions, and this follows us through our lifespan. Men using their power and control over our bodies due to the disadvantage we may have faced is another blow to our self-esteem. Build your citizens, build your women, create new grants for female-led businesses, empower girls, appoint women to leadership roles, lead the world by showing how you treat your most vulnerable. You have been elected to represent your people: do you really know who women are, how our safety is constantly compromised, and do you know the statistics in your health care system relating to our healing, health, and overall well-being?
38. Gilma Pérez Hernández
39. Heather
40. Izabella Pusök (Sweden). What I'd like to highlight is that prostitution is harmful and no one should enter into it because it minimises and degrades human beings.
41. Jeanette Westbrook MSSW (United States)
42. Julie Swede (United Kingdom)
43. Kate (United States)
44. Kathi T (United States). After 32 years out of the life I still have PTSD dreams!
45. Kellie Ziemba (United Kingdom)
46. Lehovzki Izabella (Sweden). The more I heal the more I realise how the sex industry objectified and normalised violence against me and many other women that I had the chance to meet during the time I was in this place I call a modern slavery, namely prostitution. Moreover, we as humans, by now should know better than objectifying people, providing with fair access into becoming a full human being not merely a sexual object for men's sexual urges. Therefore wholeheartedly I want to stand up for all of the women with this form of abuse because as I a human being. We deserve better and we deserve other chances which is the state and the whole society responsibility to provide just that.
47. Lila Rain (United Kingdom)

48. Liliam Altuntas (Italy). The Nordic Model is profoundly important. It is a vital step that will save the lives of countless women, girls, and children. I am already older, and forced prostitution and trafficking have devastated my life. I have been left to figure out how to survive on my own. The true difficulty was not the escape, but surviving outside with the immense trauma of constant violence. Out here, no one truly understands; people only judge and condemn. The Nordic Model can prevent thousands of women, girls, and children from ever reaching this breaking point, where the deep-seated trauma continues to destroy you even when you are free. In a way, it's even worse now, because when you were inside, you knew what to do—open your legs, and the problem was solved. But what do you do out here? There is no comprehension, no patience. Since I am an adult, the general sentiment is that it's my problem to solve, and I must see to it alone.
49. Luba Fein (Israel). Let's ban the last form of the legitimate sexual violence.
50. Marie Merklinger (Germany)
51. Marjorie Saylor (United States). Commercial sexual exploitation has devastated our society for centuries and the demand for immediate sexual gratification fuels its burning fire, which is void of humanity as it swallows up true economic equality and individual self-worth. The adult industry is a platform being used today that tells our culture it is acceptable to view our sons and daughters as products rather than persons of real value. The normalization of systems of prostitution as empowerment blinds us from the truth, and society must shift its narrative to recognize this as gender-based violence if we are to see any real change.
52. Mercedes Carpenter (United Kingdom). Please be a leader in standing up for women and girl's humanity. I need to know my country cares.
53. Merly Åsbogård (Sweden). Prostitution is torture and no modern society that truly cares about its citizens would ever support it.
54. Mia Doring (Republic of Ireland)
55. Michelle Abel (Canada). We cannot continue to allow violence to permeate our existence whilst turning a blind eye to the inhumane, and inherent consequences that befall women trapped in the clutch of exploitation. For a society that aspires to achieve equality, allowing this harm to continue is a betrayal of aspirations and hypocrisy.
56. Michelle Brewer (United States). We must move away from criminalizing victims, and stop furthering the exploitation they are already experiencing!
57. Michelle Kelly (United Kingdom)

58. Michelle Stevens (New Zealand)
59. Natasha Wyer (United Kingdom)
60. Ninna Levonen (Sweden). This will save lives, please consider this.
61. Odessa (Dess) Perkins (United States). What happens to one of us should be the business of all of us – survivors far and wide have to stick together. We will no longer be silent, we matter, our voices matter, our lives matter.
62. Pani Fem (Germany). Abolish prostitution now!
63. Pip Bray (New Zealand)
64. Rose Hunter (Australia)
65. Roxie Roots (Germany). As a survivor of the sexual exploitation industry in the UK I would like to see this change in the law. It is urgently needed!
66. Sabrinna Valisce (New Zealand)
67. Teresa Forliti (United States). I am a survivor leader who advocates for fantastic end games for those ensnared in prostitution. There is a way out. We must support legislation that holds offenders accountable.
68. Tiamoa Paige (United States)
69. Yelena Divine (Israel)

References

-
- ¹ Farley, M., Cotton, A., Lynne, J., Zumbek, S., Spiwak, F., Reyes, M.E., Alvarez, D. and Sezgin, U. (2003) 'Prostitution and trafficking in nine countries: an update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder', *Journal of Trauma Practice*, 2(3/4), pp. 33-74.
- ² Potterat, J.J., Brewer, D.D., Muth, S.Q., Rotenberg, R.B., Woodhouse, D.E., Muth, J.B., Stites, H.K. and Brody, S. (2004) 'Mortality in a long-term open cohort of prostitute women', *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 159(8), pp. 778-785; Ward, H. and Day, S. (2006) 'What happens to women who sell sex? Report of a unique occupational cohort', *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 82, pp. 413-417.
- ³ Silbert, M.H. and Pines, A.M. (1981) 'Sexual child abuse as an antecedent to prostitution', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 5(4), pp. 407-411; Bindel, Brown, Easton, Matthews and Reynolds (2012) 'Breaking down the barriers: A study of how women exit prostitution', Eaves and London South Bank University; Home Office (2004) *Paying the Price: a consultation paper on prostitution*.
- ⁴ McClanahan, S.F., McClelland, G.M., Abram, K.M. and Teplin, L.A. (1999) 'Pathways into prostitution among female jail detainees and their implications for mental health services', *Psychiatric Services*, 50(12), pp. 1606-1613; Wilson, H.W. and Widom, C.S. (2010) 'The role of youth problem behaviors in the path from child abuse and neglect to prostitution: a prospective examination', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(5), pp. 478-490; Kramer, L.A. and Berg, E.C. (2003) 'A survival analysis of timing of entry into prostitution: the differential impact of race, educational level, and childhood/adolescent risk factors', *Sociological Inquiry*, 73(4), pp. 511-528.

⁵ Farley, M., Cotton, A., Lynne, J., Zumbek, S., Spiwak, F., Reyes, M.E., Alvarez, D. and Sezgin, U. (2003) 'Prostitution and trafficking in nine countries: an update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder', *Journal of Trauma Practice*, 2(3/4), pp. 33-74; Report of the Prostitution Law Review Committee on the Operation of the Prostitution Reform Act 2003 (2008) para. 5.2.4 (New Zealand); Tamarit Sumalla, J. M. (2024) 'Mujeres cis y transexuales que practican sexo de pago: involucración y consecuencias', *Revista de Derecho Penal y Criminología*, 32 (Julio).

⁶ Farley, M., Baral, I., Kiremire, M. and Sezgin, U. (1998) 'Prostitution in five countries: violence and post-traumatic stress disorder', *Feminism & Psychology*, 8(4), pp. 405-426.