



**The Sex Workers Project of the
Urban Justice Center
Letter of Support S. 00674/A. 00459
(Ramos/Gottfried)**

The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center strongly supports S. 00674 (Ramos) and A. 00459 (Gottfried), the Survivors of Trafficking Attaining Relief Together (START) Act and urges its passage by the New York State Legislature. The Act would provide greater protections for survivors of human trafficking. The Sex Workers Project is one of the first programs in the nation to assist survivors of human trafficking and has pioneered an approach to service grounded in human rights and harm reduction informed by the real-life experiences of our clients. As the only US organization meeting the needs of both sex workers and trafficking victims, the Sex Workers Project serves a marginalized community that few others reach. Together, we are working to create a world that is safe for all workers and where human trafficking does not exist.

The START Act is a broad-based criminal record relief bill which will enable victims of trafficking to clear from their records criminal charges resulting from their exploitation. Currently, New York only allows for vacatur of certain prostitution-related convictions, which tend to primarily benefit sex-trafficked survivors. However, we know that both sex and labor trafficked survivors are forced to commit a wide-ranging spectrum of crimes, and all survivors would benefit from an expanded vacatur statute. For the multitudes of human trafficking survivors who have criminal convictions for a range of offenses committed solely as a result of being trafficked, including theft, drug possession, disorderly conduct, etc., New York's current vacatur law is insufficient.

The START Act will remedy the shortcomings of the current law to account for the myriad of other offenses that traffickers force victims to commit.

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The Sex Workers Project supports the START Act because we have seen firsthand from our clients the immense harm of criminal convictions stemming from coerced actions taken while being trafficked. We provide immigration legal services for our clients seeking immigration relief including individuals who were trafficked. For these clients, criminal convictions adversely impact their ability to obtain immigration relief and may subject them to the risk of deportation. The START Act will assist in removing these barriers and provide a path for our clients to establish safety and security and decrease their vulnerability to further exploitation. Additionally, a criminal record imposes life-long, detrimental effects on trafficking survivors—limiting access to employment and educational opportunities, financial resources, housing, as well as unfairly stigmatizing victims for acts they were forced to commit. A criminal record prevents trafficking survivors from fully moving forward with their psychosocial recovery and healing.

Criminal records continue to haunt survivors long after they have escaped the victimization and exploitation of trafficking. It is imperative that the legislature recognize that narrow record relief law hinders survivors' complete healing and reintegration. The New York State Legislature must pass the START Act, a comprehensive criminal record relief law, to alleviate the life-long impact that criminal convictions have on trafficking survivors.

The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center believes all trafficking survivors deserve a fresh START.

For more information, please contact **Mariah Grant, SWP Director of Research, Organizing and Advocacy** at mgrant@urbanjustice.org.