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Four Years Since SESTA/FOSTA was Signed, Sex Workers Call on Congress to Learn from its Mistake

On the Anniversary of SESTA/FOSTA, Sex Worker Rights Organizations Hold a Call-in Day to Demand Passage of the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act

On April 11, 2022, sex workers are marking the four-year anniversary of SESTA/FOSTA's passage into law by calling on Congress to study how this disastrous law impacted sex worker communities through the passage of the [SAFE SEX Workers Study Act](#). On March 3, International Sex Workers Rights Day, Rep. Ro Khanna, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Rep. Barbara Lee and Sen. Ron Wyden [reintroduced this historic bill](#) with the [support of 70 different organizations](#) from anti-violence, public health, technology, and civil and human rights. This bill makes a simple ask of Congress: use evidence and not assumptions when legislating.

As sex workers have alerted in community-based research, the harms caused by SESTA/FOSTA were immediate. In the days between Congress passing SESTA/FOSTA and its signing on April 11, 2018, dozens of platforms shut down or began kicking off sex workers. These platforms included avenues sex workers relied on for income and harm reduction practices, including advertising sites, reddit threads where they exchanged safety information, dating sites, and a website used to both screen clients and build community.

In the days, weeks, months, and years since SESTA/FOSTA became law, community based organizations have been forced to fill the void left by the sudden loss of online platforms. Immediately following its passage, these organizations scrambled to serve the surging need for support. They also became the only groups documenting the law's harms and consequences on people who trade sex, including survivors of trafficking. It is this very evidence that sex workers are demanding Congress look at and further research to inform policymaking that impacts the safety and wellbeing of people who trade sex and public health more broadly. It is long overdue that Congress do its due diligence.



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"In April of 2018, with the passage of FOSTA/SESTA and the closure of Backpage, sex workers across the globe lost a range of digital platforms used for meeting resource needs, staying safe, accessing community, and organizing. In the last several years, the community has reported a range of impacts of losing these digital spaces - increased violence and dependence to fear and erasure. The SAFE SEX Worker Study Act is the first bill which asks the government to take a serious look at what happens when marginalized communities are turned into legal liabilities for the spaces they seek to stay safe.," said **Kate D'Adamo, Partner, Reframe Health and Justice.**

"It is unacceptable for the government to see sex workers as nothing more than collateral damage in their pursuit to regulate digital spaces. In the years since SESTA/FOSTA's passage, through the lived experiences of our staff and clients, we have seen the direct harm it has caused on people who trade sex. This harm has disproportionately targeted some of the most marginalized communities, including Trans women of color, rural sex workers, survivors of violence, and migrants. As we mark another year since its passage, Congress must finally heed the dire warnings of sex workers on the misguided path the government is on in the name of digital oversight. Congress must pass the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act," explained **Mariah Grant, Director of Research and Advocacy, the Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center.**

Sex workers anticipated the damage SESTA/FOSTA would bring. They sounded the alarm but Congress didn't listen. Now, on the law's four year anniversary, sex workers and allies call on Congress once more to not ignore the consequences of SESTA/FOSTA. Congress must pass SAFE SEX Workers Study Act to realize a critically needed shift in how we understand digital oversight and regulation, anti-trafficking efforts, and sex workers' rights.

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