



Sex
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Project

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On Sex Worker Pride Day, Human Rights Organizations Urge Congress to Pass the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act

On September 14, 2022—Sex Worker Pride Day—75 organizations representing sex worker rights, public health, technology, reproductive justice, anti-trafficking, racial justice, and civil and human rights, sent a letter to Congress urging passage of the “SESTA and FOSTA Examination of Secondary Effects for Sex Workers Study Act” or the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act. This bill, reintroduced on March 3, 2022—International Sex Workers Rights Day—[in the House](#) by Representative Ro Khanna, and [in the Senate](#) by Senator Elizabeth Warren, would study the impact of [SESTA/FOSTA](#) on the wellbeing and rights of people who trade sex, including sex workers and human trafficking survivors.

[The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center \(SWP\)](#) spearheaded the effort to highlight the [devastating impacts of SESTA/FOSTA](#) on people who trade sex, including sex workers and human trafficking survivors, and the urgent need for Congress to rigorously study these consequences through the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act. Since SESTA/FOSTA passed in April 2018, many sex workers saw the online platforms they relied on to vet clients, build community, and stay safe while working erased. By kicking sex workers offline, SESTA/FOSTA put them more at risk of exploitation, including trafficking, despite the law’s purported purpose to curb human trafficking.

As demonstrated by the breadth of civil and human rights organizations signed onto the letter, the effects of SESTA/FOSTA are broad and extend beyond the people involved in the sex trades. In the letter, SWP along with the letter’s endorsers, raise the alarm that despite SESTA/FOSTA being sold as an anti-trafficking tool, it has [rarely been used in anti-trafficking](#) cases and instead led online platforms to [censor content flagged as sexual in nature at a much higher rate](#). This not only impacts sex workers’ safety, but everyone seeking reproductive and sexual health information online. With the overturning of Roe, and state legislatures increasingly introducing and passing [bills that target the LGBTQIA+ community](#), access to sexual health information online is more important than ever.

The consequences of SESTA/FOSTA and the ramifications of shuttering sites where sex workers once advertised and organized impacts the safety of people in the sex trades globally. The letter sent to Congress shows this with sign on coming from sex worker rights organizations



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based not only in the US, but also throughout Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and Latin America. Given the vast harm caused by SESTA/FOSTA, it is critical Congress pass the SAFE SEX Workers Study Act allowing lawmakers to rely on evidence and not assumption in their efforts to regulate digital spaces and counter human trafficking.

“Choosing to engage in sex work as an adult is a human right and laws that do not reflect this undermine people’s right to bodily autonomy, freedom of expression, choice of employment, and even life itself. The SAFE SEX Workers Study Act is a critical step to right the wrongs of SESTA/FOSTA by genuinely and rigorously investigating and reporting on the law’s impacts on sex workers and people experiencing trafficking in the sex trades,” explained Mariah Grant, Director of Research and Advocacy for the **Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center**

“In order for Sex Workers to be counted, Sex Workers must be accurately represented and considered. The harm of FOSTA-SESTA cannot be easily quantified, but this is a step in the right direction.” Eliza Sorensen, Co-Founder, **Assembly Four**

“Sex workers became even more vulnerable after the passage of SESTA/FOSTA in 2018 which pushed more sex workers offline and into the streets, where they have to work in isolated areas to avoid arrest and deal with clients without background checks. The SAFE SEX Workers Study Act would study these effects, helping us make informed policy decisions that protect sex workers’ health and rights. Sex workers, like all workers, have the right to safety and security as they make a living.” LaLa Zannell, **American Civil Liberties Union**

“SESTA/FOSTA is a complete failure for trafficking victims and a disgrace for sex workers.” Sabrina Sanchez, **European Sex Workers Rights Alliance**

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