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PRESS RELEASE

SEX WORKERS DISMAYED AT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO HISTORIC BEDFORD DECISION

Today, members of POWER and other sex workers and allies across Canada expressed dismay and disappointment following the introduction of a Bill in the House of Commons that would criminalize the purchase of sex. The Minister of Justice tabled the Bill in response to the Supreme Court of Canada’s historic decision in *Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford*, in which Canada’s highest court struck down key Criminal Code provisions relating to prostitution on the grounds that they put sex workers health, safety and lives at risk. The Court suspended its decision for a year to give the Government an opportunity to respond.

“Frankly, this response is heartbreaking,” said Emily Symons, Chair of POWER’s Board of Directors. “The Minister had an opportunity to work with sex workers and other concerned parties to develop a solution that supports the safety and human rights of sex workers. Instead, he has chosen to import an approach that will reproduce the harms of the current prostitution laws and won’t stand up to a constitutional challenge. The Supreme Court of Canada made a clear, unanimous statement that the health, safety and lives of sex workers must be prioritized. It is deeply disappointing that the Government of Canada does not share these priorities.”

“The evidence is clear: criminalizing clients reproduces sex workers’ vulnerability to violence and victimization,” added Frederique Chabot, a member of POWER. “Just yesterday, a Vancouver study confirmed evidence from Sweden and Norway that criminalizing clients does not eliminate the sex industry or assist vulnerable individuals, but instead forces sex workers into isolated areas and restricts their ability to screen clients, to negotiate services, and to insist on safer sex. In light of clear evidence that implementing this model would reproduce the same harms as the previous legal regime, I simply cannot fathom why the Minister would even consider implementing this approach.”

Caroline Newcastle, a member of POWER and current sex worker, noted that “meaningful consultation with sex workers might have meant that the proposed law would be responsive to sex workers’ concerns. POWER will continue to present the voices and perspectives of sex workers as this Bill moves through the legislative

process. In particular, we hope for an opportunity to present these perspectives to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice.”

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