

Friday, September 5, 2008

The proponents of Proposition K, a measure to decriminalize prostitution and prohibit some sex-traffic investigations, realize that the measure won't do anything to prevent the often-desperate circumstances that lead people into sex work. They admit that the measure is merely a beginning, that may "point towards decriminalizing other parts of this industry," as Carol Leigh, director of the Bay Area Sex Workers Advocacy Network, told The Chronicle's editorial board.

They even admit that, if you live in a neighborhood like, say, Capp Street in the Inner Mission, where the prostitution trade is pervasive and the many things that accompany it - violence, drugs, sirens - run rampant, things might get worse if this measure passes. But hey, that's a small price to pay for progressive policy, isn't it?

Sex work is a dangerous profession, and many of those who work in the trade are suffering in other ways - whether it's because they have been the victims of the international trade in human trafficking that is an enormous problem in San Francisco, or because they are addicted to drugs, or because they are former foster children without parents or homes. We don't believe that people who engage in sex work should be ignored when they suffer violence or assault, and we would appreciate it if the Police Department used prostitution arrests as a way to guide those in trouble toward programs that could help them.

But Prop. K is not the way to achieve this.

When they came to speak to us, Prop. K's proponents didn't seem interested in how it will work on a practical - as opposed to philosophical - basis. Perhaps that's because, in reality, the measure won't work.

Prohibiting the Police Department from conducting sex-traffic investigations that involve a racial profiling component (certain countries in Asia and Eastern Europe are disproportionately involved in the trade) will, shock, allow sex trafficking to flourish. Decriminalizing prostitution will, shock, lead to more open sightings and solicitations of it in the areas of the city that already see enough of it.

And while the proponents cite the example of New Zealand to claim that there won't be a "magnet" effect - e.g., more prostitutes traveling into the city - San Francisco is not New Zealand, and the BART train is not the Pacific Ocean. In the tightly knit and densely populated Bay Area, why wouldn't this measure draw more prostitution to the city?

If this is just the beginning of where this measure will lead, then we really don't want to see the end.

Four years ago, the citizens of Berkeley faced a decriminalization measure on their ballot. Berkeley is a city that believes in taking progressive risks, not conservative thinking. And yet the people of Berkeley were sensible enough to think through all of the rotten implications of this idea four years ago, and overwhelmingly reject the measure. The citizens of San Francisco should do the same.

Vote no on Prop. K. <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/09/05/EDMP12MN77.DTL>