

February 24, 2024

My name is Amber Nickerson and I'm with the Community United for Safety and Protection. I'm asking you to amend this bill to use the criminal definitions of sex trafficking and prostitution of a minor.

As a teenager in Alaska I grew up in foster care and group homes.

I ran away from group homes and I used sex as a survival tool.

The first time I was paid for sex was after I was raped while on the run from a group home. Police had me wear a wire and tell my rapist that if he paid me, I wouldn't report him. He did pay me, but the police kept the money.

In 2012 Alaska made a bad sex trafficking law based on the same kind of misleading statistics that would be created by this bill as it is written. In 2014 I was charged under that statute with eight felony counts of sex trafficking just for being a sex worker working with other sex workers for our safety.

At my sentencing the prosecutor said over and over that the state was not accusing me of abusing my colleagues, they were only accusing me of having a place of prostitution and of screening clients for our safety.

When sex workers have to work outdoors and don't have the ability to screen clients for safety we are killed by men like Brian Steven Smith, who is currently on trial for killing two sex workers in Anchorage. I have been attending the trial for the last two weeks and I am outraged that this state's war on sex workers and Alaska Native women pushed Kathleen Henry and Veronica Abouchuk into such vulnerable positions.

After I was prosecuted I took a plea deal. I lost my home, years of my children's lives, and my ability to support my children.

If this bill is passed as-is the misleading statistics it creates will be used to create bad policy that will target women like me who grew up in foster care and running away from abusive group homes. This bill is part of the foster care to prison pipeline.

Please amend it to use the criminal definitions of sex trafficking and prostitution of minors.