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December 1, 2010

Ottawa sex workers demand inquiry into police mistreatment

OTTAWA – An Ottawa sex workers' organization is demanding that the Ontario Human Rights Commission investigate widespread abuses of police power.

An extensive new report co-authored by a prominent criminologist reveals instances of violence and intimidation by Ottawa police officers against local sex workers. It also demonstrates the ways that Canada's prostitution laws endanger and stigmatize people working in the sex trade.

The report, commissioned by POWER (Prostitutes of Ottawa, Work, Educate, Resist) features interviews with more than 40 Ottawa-area sex workers and represents the most comprehensive study of its kind. Co-authored by prominent University of Ottawa criminologist Dr. Chris Bruckert and Fr d rique Chabot, the report *Challenges: Ottawa Sex Workers Speak Out* reveals that:

- **The Ottawa Police routinely harass, intimidate and assault sex workers.** The report documents dozens of cases where police officers have abused their powers – taking sex workers for “starlight tours,” harassing their friends and families and conducting humiliating and illegal strip searches.
- **The criminalization of sex work is putting Ottawa sex workers in grave danger.** The report confirms the recent ruling by Justice Himel, striking down Canada's prostitution laws. The report demonstrates that criminalization makes Ottawa sex workers fear the police and means that they are less likely to call for help when they are in danger. In addition, the practice of “red zoning” sex workers as a bail condition or as a “promise to appear” by police means that sex workers are effectively barred from their homes, communities and all support services.
- **Sex workers in Ottawa suffer from stigma and discrimination – limiting their current and future life options.** The report documents numerous instances where sex workers have been fired from their jobs or alienated from their families, due to having a criminal record or being “outed” by police against their will.

POWER is demanding that the Ottawa police cease enforcing prostitution laws and stop harassing sex workers. Working with Ottawa Feminist Law Firm Galldin Law, POWER has written to the Ontario Human Rights Commission demanding an inquiry into police treatment of sex workers in Ottawa.

Lawyer Karin Galldin, who worked with POWER to submit their complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Commission says, “The Ottawa Police must be held accountable for their discriminatory practices and the role they play in perpetuating harmful stereotypes in the community.”

According to Dr. Bruckert, “The report powerfully demonstrates how the criminalization of consensual sex between adults not only undermines sex workers' human rights but also exposes them to violence.”

The report is officially being launched on December 2 at 6pm at Venus Envy (320 Lisgar Street). Visit POWER's website at www.powerottawa.ca to download a copy of the report and of POWER's official request for an inquiry into police actions.

For more information or to book interviews:

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