

What will Closing Backpage.com Actually Do?

Despite how much debate we see about Backpage and other advertising sites, we still rarely hear the voices of sex workers. The *Sex Workers Outreach Project-New York City and Sex Workers Action New York* (SWOP-NYC & SWANK) would like to identify the unintended consequences which arise out of a solution based on a misunderstanding of the problem. It is essential to listen to the voices of those who are most impacted, and as a membership-based, grassroots organization, we refuse to allow organizations to speak and make decisions on our behalf.

- **Sex work does NOT EQUAL Trafficking:** The conflation of these issues perpetuates policies and practices that make it harder to support trafficked persons and cause unintended harms to those who work under other circumstances.
- **Pushing sex work underground makes it harder to identify trafficking situations:** With countless advertising sites, closing the most public and largest ones will only increase traffic to sites that are less willing to work with law enforcement. It is conceivable that without Backpage.com, the 50 cases of sex trafficking identified through the website may not have been discovered at all. Currently, Backpage.com has a full-time staff dedicated to reviewing all ads, and reporting suspicious inquiries to law enforcement. After the closing of Craigslist's adult services, one San Francisco detective noted, "It's a great tool for us, to be honest."
- **Flawed anti-trafficking work will only divert valuable resources away from trafficked persons.** There is so much to be done to support victims of trafficking; spending vital resources on these tactics means fewer resources and services. Like any other form of labor trafficking, factors including lack of access to affordable housing, living-wage employment, and industry informality are major causes of trafficking. Shifting our focus to addressing those needs will not only promote an end to this practice, but the rights of those we seek to support.

*Why only prosecute trafficking when we can **prevent** it, too?*

What keeping sex work illegal and underground REALLY does:

- Increases in victimization, including assault, theft, and coercion
- Less able to screen clients and other harm-reduction information which helps keep sex workers safe on the job
- When victimized, sex workers are less likely to report crimes to law enforcement
- Fewer trails and safety mechanisms which make it easier to find justice when sex workers are victimized
- Increase in transmission of sexually transmitted infections and HIV
- Less able to negotiate with clients for things including condom use
- Increased marginalization makes it harder to access resources and fight stigma
- More arrests and convictions make it more difficult for those trying to exit the industry.