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Sex workers in the ACT are still not back to work!

Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association and our member organisations call on the ACT Government to remove discriminatory restrictions on brothels, escort agencies and strip bars and enable sex workers to get back to work. Our organisations are disappointed with the lack of certainty sex workers are experiencing in the Territory. Sex work must be considered within government planning and policy making, in the same way that other industries are being considered. Clear communication is necessary to ensure that the industry does not fall outside of public health aims and objectives.

Sex workers and sex industry businesses are ready to implement their COVID Safety Plans and open for business. Other personal and contact based services in the ACT were able to return to work on Saturday 30th May, 2020 and almost all other territorians are back to work, including remedial massage therapists, tattoo and body modification technicians, beauty therapists, nail and waxing technicians and full-contact training for all sports people. The remaining restrictions relate to larger gatherings and venues with capacity over 100 people. There is no public health evidence that supports singling out or treating the sex industry differently as part of an effective COVID-19 response. It is discrimination to continue restrictions on brothels, escort agencies and strip bars.

Many sex workers have been unable to access government financial support and have been subject to continued strain and uncertainty of when they can return to work to support themselves and their dependents. Prohibiting sex work businesses to operate, even when all other businesses are back at work, will result in the creation of a less transparent industry and will damage the hard fought gains in public health and workplace health and safety, as well as endangering the wellbeing and financial livelihood of sex workers.

Across Australia in all other states and territories, with the exception of VIC, the COVID-19 restrictions on sex industry businesses have been lifted. This has occurred without negative impact on public health and rates of COVID-19 transmission.

Sex workers and sex industry businesses have been proactive in implementing COVID safe ways of working to protect themselves, their clients and the community. Sex workers have demonstrated a strong track record of implementing safer working practices and pro-actively seeking the latest health and scientific data to support risk reduction decision making.

However, the good practices being put into place nationally are at risk in the ACT if the government does not move to include sex work in broad COVID safe policies. Leaving ACT

sex workers out and prohibiting them from returning to work is not an option. We urge the ACT government to immediately ease the inequitable restrictions on sex industry businesses and enable sex workers to get back to work.

Our organisations seek a response to this communication as a matter of urgency. Attempts at representations to the ACT Minister for Health, Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith and Chief Health Officer Dr Kerryn Coleman to discuss this matter have been unsuccessful. This remains a critical issue for our community.

We eagerly await your response. Please contact Scarlet Alliance CEO, Jules Kim at ceo@scarletalliance.org.au if you require any further information.

Regards,

Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association
SWOP ACT
SWOP NSW
SWOP NT
Respect Inc QLD
SIN SA
Magenta WA
SWEAR WA
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