

Dear Friends of a Safe and Diverse DC,

We are hoping that your agency or you will sign this letter to oppose two bills proposed by the Mayor that, if passed, would harm clients of our services and restrict everyone's rights in Washington DC. This letter was written by the Alliance for a Safe and Diverse DC, a group of non-profit agencies and advocates, convened in April 2005 to strategize about the legislation and related issues. We will use the letter illustrate to the Chairs of the Committees discussing the legislation and other members of DC city council, that there is widespread concern in the community about the bills. We understand that you may need to read more about the campaign and we encourage you to visit <http://www.differentavenues.org/SafeDCAlliance.html>

We would also be happy to speak on the phone about the issues and you can call Penelope Saunders (Executive Director of Different Avenues) on 202/829-2103, Darby Hickey (Different Avenues) on 202/829-2103 or Cyndee Clay (Executive Director, HIPS) on 202/232-8150.

If you decide to sign on to the letter then please send an email, fax or call Caeden Dempsey at:
email - ctdempsey@gmail.com fax - 202.393.2241 phone - 202.639.6332.

We'll need your name, organizational role, and contact details for your organization. If you are not representing an organization, please express your interest and we will contact you to see how you can be added to the letter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Caeden Dempsey, on behalf of the Alliance for a Safe and Diverse DC

Dear D.C. City Council:

WHILE SHARING THE DC COUNCIL'S DESIRE TO CREATE A SAFER CITY, we write to strongly oppose elements of two bills currently under review by the DC City Council, the Omnibus Public Safety Act of 2005, 16-247 and Prostitution-related Nuisance Abatement Act of 2005, B16-80. If passed into law, both would harm the people our agencies serve and represent. Even more importantly, as experienced agencies working with communities targeted by this legislation, we know that these bills will be ineffective in addressing issues of prostitution in our community. They will actively work against they city's own public health efforts, increase profiling, and be prohibitively expensive to enforce.

The approach to prostitution proposed in Bill 16-247 and B16-80 will be both expensive to police and ineffective. Title XX and XXI of Bill 16-247 attempt to solve problems of "public nuisance" and improve "quality of life" in DC by imposing fines of hundreds of dollars, along with mandatory imprisonment in some cases, for prostitution and by creating "prostitution free zones". The proposed legislation would allow police to rely on, amongst other things, their own identification of "known" prostitutes, even if the individuals were doing nothing wrong at the time of the encounter. These Bills will undermine everyone's right to enjoy public space in the District of Columbia. We are concerned that this very broad sweeping power over people walking, standing or conversing in public areas of DC will increase racial profiling, and will increase harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered citizens of our city. Specifically, we are greatly concerned that police will misinterpret community building and public socializing by these people as "a group of 2 or more persons [congregating] for the purposes of prostitution or prostitution-related offenses" as defined under Title XXI of Bill 16-247.

Bill 16-80 proposes to further criminalize activities supposedly associated with prostitution, such as loitering, and criminalize "erotic massage", providing law enforcement with a way of targeting "place-based prostitution." Using this type of enforcement for place-based prostitution will place people trafficked into such situations, voluntary participants and the organizations that provide outreach for health and rights promotion purposes at risk. Many of those targeted by this bill face a range of pressing health and legal needs but are alienated from, or unaware of, services in the district that could help them lead safer lives: many are immigrants or young women who are fearful of institutions and discrimination. Bill 16-80 is not only unnecessary legislation, but it will make its target population even more difficult to reach and will undermine the work of health-promotion organizations.

These bills will greatly increase the number of people arrested, burdening tax payers, without offering any real alternatives. We do not need more laws against prostitution in Washington DC to build a safer city. We need solutions that provide comprehensive services that truly address people's needs, and protect the rights of all residents, wealthy and poor.

We strongly urge the Council to reject titles XX and XXI of Bill 16-247 and Bill B16-80 and to consider finding creative solutions that work. We suggest that the City Council establish a consultative group of organizations with experience working with sex workers, migrants, and others affected by these issues so that we can build a safe, diverse, and open Washington DC for everyone.

Sincerely,