

Edmonton prostitutes threatened by Supreme Court's decision: Advocate

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An Edmonton group working to fight sexual exploitation is slamming the Supreme Court's decision to strike down Canada's prostitution laws.

"We are profoundly disappointed," said Kate Quinn, executive director of the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE).

"We feel that the Supreme Court did not truly listen to the voices of the women, men and transgendered who come to CEASE for help. And also, we feel they did not listen to the realities of neighbourhood families who live with the consequences of men cruising, harassing and exploiting people in their neighbourhoods."

On Friday, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down Criminal Code provisions prohibiting brothels, living on the avails of prostitution and communicating in public with clients, finding the laws violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Parliament has one year to write new laws, if it chooses to do so.

Quinn hopes the ruling at least opens the door for stronger laws targeting purchasers of sex, and said CEASE will advocate for a Nordic style law that puts responsibility on those who profit from — and create demand for — sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Sweden has seen a decrease in prostitution and sex trafficking since instituting a Nordic model, which punishes buyers of sex with fines measured to their income on first offence, and can dish out jail time for repeat offences.

Quinn says eliminating all prostitution laws only protects buyers of sex.

"There are a lot of micro brothels in Edmonton ... We're making it safer for the men to go to those places, but do we really care about the women maybe being brought in from China or being taken across the country (to work there)? No, we're making it easier for men to buy sex."

The ruling was made in response to a court challenge by three Ontario women who have worked in the sex trade, who argued sex workers are safest when they can hire security guards and work indoors.

Retired Edmonton Police Service vice cop Jack Kraus, who spent nine years working with street prostitutes and others involved in the sex trade, said the ruling ignores the most vulnerable people on the "bottom end," who are often controlled by gangs and face addiction and mental

health issues.

“Do you think that that girl (working downtown) is suddenly going to have a house to go into and have a wonderful place and protection and white sheets and whatever people think a professional brothel is? Nothing is going to change for them,” Kraus said.

“The only thing that will change is that there will be no police watching out for them. That will put them in an even more dangerous situation because nobody’s out there watching for them, because there’s no law against any of it.”

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