

Urban Justice Center

Sex Workers' rights and Human Trafficking

<https://www.urbanjustice.org/2021/09/11/how-to-support-sex-trafficking-survivors-without-harming-consenting-sex-workers/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Sex trafficking is one of the worst criminal phenomena of the 21st Century. Every day, traffickers kidnap innocent people, often underage children, and force them into sex slavery. Dozens of organizations have popped up to fight the scourge. Although they sound like they are fighting a noble war, some of these nonprofits have spent time and resources trying to outlaw legal, consenting sex workers who have nothing to do with the sex trafficking trade. Their missions extend beyond preventing sex trafficking into banning all forms of pornography, although they tend to mostly tout the former when convincing lawmakers and [celebrities](#) to join their causes.

For years, several sex trafficking nonprofits have aligned the legal porn industry with sex traffickers. In 2018, [Polaris](#), [Coalition Against Trafficking in Women](#), [Exodus Cry](#), and other advocates who oppose sex trafficking urged Congress to pass [FOSTA/SESTA](#). Once former President Donald Trump signed the legislation from the House and Senate into law, websites became liable for ads, comments, and more content related to sex trafficking. Although it sounds good, the law doesn't make a distinction between legal sex work and sex trafficking. The [Columbia Human Rights Law Review](#) reports that prosecutors have rarely charged a trafficker because of FOSTA/SESTA, but the legislation "had a chilling effect on free speech." The new rules have [scared](#) banks and other financial companies from working with legal, adult, consenting pornographers. FOSTA/SESTA is making it harder for law-abiding pornographers like myself to do our jobs, even though our jobs are legal in the U.S. and we have nothing to do with sex trafficking. And, according to [Vox](#), FOSTA/SESTA made it so much less safe for in-person sex workers to vet clients and increased violence against women.

After the *New York Times* published a story detailing horrific accounts of child endangerment videos and revenge porn on Pornhub, Exodus Cry, and other FOSTA/SESTA supporters lobbied MasterCard, Visa, and various financial companies to refuse to process payments for porn companies. MasterCard quickly barred payments from Pornhub, even though to sell a video on Pornhub, [you now have to verify your age](#) with an ID and provide banking account information for payment. Several months later, OnlyFans briefly [banned](#) porn, blaming the move on banks that allegedly didn't want to process payments to sex workers (and wouldn't comment on the matter), according to the Financial Times.

For many legal adult industry veterans, human trafficking often seems like a mask for anti-porn crusaders. Their crusade is working. As a decade-plus veteran of the adult industry, performing in over 1,000 porn videos, I have never seen so many threats to porn. The Free Speech Coalition (FSC), an adult industry lobbying group, says we are fighting more laws than ever. "FSC hired federal lobbyists to help us more effectively reach the members of Congress working on legislation that impacts sex workers and sexual speech," says Mike Stabile, an FSC representative. The coalition is especially concerned with "laws and regulations that encourage banking discrimination for adult businesses." The crisis has grown so large, the group has launched a fundraising campaign to hire more lobbyists.

At the same time, horrible criminals are sex trafficking people outside of our industry, and these people deserve our help. To stereotype all nonprofits is to do to others what people have done to pornographers for years. More importantly, as dutiful members of our neighborhoods and cities, legal professional pornographers should help survivors. Recently, I have been speaking to social justice experts about good organizations to support. Here are some ways adult performers and sex worker allies can help sex trafficking survivors without assisting the nonprofits that want to take down consenting sex workers.

When it comes to nonprofits, national groups often focus on lobbying legislators to create new laws, but local organizations work on the ground with survivors. Local groups tend to help survivors find homes, jobs, and mental health assistance. But where to find a solid nonprofit working with survivors in your area?

Answering what is the best group is "a tricky question because many organizations that serve survivors are more localized, says Kate D'Adamo, a long-time sex worker rights advocate who previously was the national policy advocate at the Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center, which works to destigmatize and decriminalize people in the sex trade. The best group may not have the best SEO on Google, and many anti-porn sex trafficking national groups take out ads on search platforms.

D'Adamo encourages prospective donors or volunteers to check out the [Freedom Network](#). [The group](#) connects donors and volunteers to local organizations specializing in assisting sex trafficking survivors with job training, legal and social services, and housing. They're an excellent service to connect volunteers and donors with organizations that help survivors.

Research the group before you donate or volunteer (let alone join a nonprofit's sponsored protest). Of course, it's time-consuming to research which group to assist in a world where everyone is working a million hustles. Sites like Charity Navigator and Charity Watch make it easy. They grade groups on standards such as how much they spend on helping people versus executive salaries.

One extraordinary group is the [Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Traffic](#) (or CAST). Charity Navigator gives it a "give with confidence" ranking for a good reason. Based in Los Angeles, CAST offers survivors free legal assistance. They also create mentorship programs for

survivors to help them find jobs. They run a shelter for survivors who are searching for a place to live, as well.

Other groups to check out are homeless shelters and domestic violence organizations. Although they focus on helping homeless people find shelter, their missions often include helping sex trafficking survivors. "Trafficking is, in terms of service provision, just a line of funding," D'Adamo says. "Your local immigration/refugee org might have a trafficking program, or your local DV shelter may receive survivors of trafficking for services."

It's easy to write a check to an organization and feel good about yourself, but to further help survivors, we must work with them. Visit your local women's shelter, homeless assistance nonprofit, or domestic violence survivors group and ask how you can help trafficking survivors. When you volunteer, you may find out that trafficking survivors need help buying food, assistance applying for new jobs, or moral support. And remember to always listen to survivors about what they need instead of making your own assumptions.

As legal consenting pornographers operating ethical businesses, we should help. For one, we have a self-servicing interest: Volunteering reminds people that we are law-abiding citizens just like them, not sex traffickers. But more importantly, as members in good standing with our local communities, we should help survivors. It's the right thing to do.

The public, not just sex workers, can follow this same advice to support sex trafficking survivors. Porn consumers can also be cognizant of where they watch online porn, choosing to visit sites that verify performers, ensure their consent, and pay them for their work.

Not all pornographers are bad, and not all sex trafficking survivors' organizations are bad. We must help the charities doing good work. They deserve it, and so do the survivors they assist.

A two-time winner of the AVN Award for MILF Performer of the Year, Cherie DeVille is the internet's favorite stepmom, a former presidential candidate, and a physical therapist. She lives in Los Angeles.

[What can or should we learn from porn](#)

[Pornhub deleted millions of videos. And then what happened?](#)

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