

Women's Liberation Front (WoLF) is a national radical feminist organization.

Because of the way that HB1816 is currently written, WoLF is unable to support this bill.

If Washington decides to move forward with the creation of a task force, WoLF urges the state to clarify if the task force will examine full decriminalization of prostitution or only partial decriminalization (the Equality Model).

Policies that fully decriminalize prostitution normalize sexual violence, fail to protect victims, and fail to hold pimps and buyers accountable for their systematic exploitation of women, children, and men.

There is an excellent alternative to full decriminalization: partial decriminalization, also known as the Equality Model ("Nordic Model"). This is a trauma-informed policy that recognizes prostitution as a form of sexual violence. When the Equality Model is implemented, buyers and traffickers are criminalized and held accountable for their harmful behaviors. Simultaneously, all people whose bodies are used for sex are treated by law enforcement as potential victims rather than as criminals; they are given options for victim advocacy services and other forms of assistance.

First and foremost, HB1816 refers to prostitution as "sex work" and as an "industry." This language normalizes sexual violence as a job or a career. Phrases such as "sex work," "sex industry," and "sex trade" encourage people to view prostitution as a normal or acceptable activity; these phrases normalize the idea that sexual consent is something that can be purchased or traded. These phrases and words intentionally obfuscate and erase the inherent power imbalances that exist between buyers and victims. Because pro-prostitution language is used in this bill, WoLF cannot feel confident that a task force would be able to neutrally engage in research or analysis that would sufficiently recognize and address the numerous harms caused by CSE. HB1816 clearly uses biased language in favor of prostitution.

Second, WoLF is deeply troubled by the possibility that Washington is placing a price tag on the trauma experienced by prostitution victims. HB1816 suggests that a task force should examine the "fiscal impact" of decriminalization. WoLF wonders why a fiscal impact study would belong in a task force study of decriminalization. Partial decriminalization could potentially increase costs for the state, if the state decided to commit more resources for law enforcement trainings, prosecution of buyers and traffickers, safe housing for victims, counseling for victims, and other much-needed victim services. Full decriminalization could potentially decrease costs for the state, since law enforcement would no longer arrest or prosecute buyers and traffickers. Not enough information is provided in HB1816 to explain why the state would be interested in the fiscal impact of full decriminalization or partial decriminalization. The goal of a fiscal impact study must not be whether Washington would financially benefit from the decriminalization of a brutal form of sexual violence. Rather, a fiscal impact study should evaluate the financial investment that Washington needs to make so it can simultaneously respond to prostitution victims in a trauma-informed manner and ensure that law enforcement officers and prosecutors

will be sufficiently prepared to hold buyers and traffickers accountable. WoLF urges Washington to prioritize the needs of prostitution victims, law enforcement, and prosecutors, even if that means the state needs to invest more money.

Finally, WoLF cannot support this bill as it is currently written because LGBTQ communities appear to be prioritized over women. This bill would provide funding for the state LGBTQ commission to implement and lead the task force. While the LGBTQ commission may indeed represent a population that is disproportionately affected by prostitution, it is unclear why an LGBTQ group has been selected to lead this project, rather than a women's rights group. Women and girls are disproportionately harmed by prostitution; the number one risk factor for being victimized in prostitution is being born female in a patriarchy. An LGBTQ commission should certainly represent the interests of lesbians and bisexual women. However, heterosexual women and girls are not represented by LGBTQ groups. All women and girls, regardless of their sexual orientations, are disproportionately harmed by prostitution; it does not matter if they are heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual. Women and girls comprise the vast majority of CSE victims. Leadership for this type of a task force belongs to a group that represents the interests of all women and acknowledges how all women and girls are harmed by prostitution.