

# **Punish the clients, not the prostitutes, says Tory MP Joy Smith**

## **Nordic model prostitution laws create basis for proposed Canadian legislation**

BY DEREK SPALDING, OTTAWA CITIZEN FEBRUARY 13, 2014

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/Punish+clients+prostitutes+says+Tory+Smith/9503018/story.html>

OTTAWA The Conservative government's loudest advocate for making the purchase of sex illegal in Canada has outlined her vision for redrafting the country's prostitution laws.

MP Joy Smith of Kildonan-St. Paul riding in Winnipeg was expected to release a report, titled the Tipping Point, on Thursday for legislation that would criminalize people who buy sex, not the people who sell it.

The 16-page document, released early to the Citizen, outlines in detail how a model similar to the one used in several European countries would target johns and pimps instead of prostitutes.

Smith's proposal also calls for resources for anyone wanting out of the sex trade industry, plus a national awareness campaign that emphasizes how prostitution is harmful to women and the most vulnerable sectors of society.

Her proposal, similar to the Nordic model used in several European countries, comes slightly more than a month after the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the country's prostitution laws. The court ruled the laws unconstitutional in December and gave government one year to rewrite them.

"I am pleased that there are many MPs that support the Nordic model for Canada," Smith said. "Once you understand the options, the Nordic model is clearly the only approach that effectively addresses the harm and inequality produced by prostitution and targets the buyers of sex."

Her proposal suggests johns be given fines when caught paying a prostitute for sex. Those fines would increase for repeat offenders and eventually escalate to jail time.

Smith also calls for mandatory minimum sentences for anyone convicted of human trafficking, and she wants restrictions on bawdy houses without criminalizing prostituted women.

No woman would be punished under legislation proposed by Smith. In her report she outlines how most "women involved in prostitution are controlled by violent pimps and traffickers." She also explains that people who claim to be in the sex trade by

choice often use prostitution as a means of “survival or to maintain an addiction.”

“Canadian legislation should not criminalize these women,” she concludes.

Critics of the Nordic model say the new laws would not improve the safety of prostitutes and could actually make them worse by forcing women and traffickers to operate in even more secrecy.

But Smith has garnered widespread support for her proposal. Her report lists 16 organizations that endorse her approach, including the Native Women’s Association of Canada, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and Walk With Me, a group that provides support for survivors of human trafficking.

The verdict is still out on the Nordic model for Christina Harrison Baird, an international human rights lawyer in Ottawa. She said she has the “greatest respect” for Smith and her years of work fighting human trafficking but said questions remain about how criminalizing johns would affect sex workers.

She said she worries there will be increased risk of violence against prostitutes because the men still paying for sex will be the more violent offenders. Harrison Baird also wanted to know the extent of the public education campaign that she says would be essential to adopting such a model.

“Sweden spent years and millions of dollars on public awareness and education campaigns to shift attitudes toward gender in order to lay the ground work for criminal law,” she said. “You can’t just transplant something without the ground work being laid first.”

Groups such as the Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking support Smith’s proposal because it targets johns and traffickers.

“Once there’s penalties and deterrents, men would be more reluctant to buy sex,” said Helen Roos of the coalition.

She too insists that a public education campaign, plus resources to help survivors of trafficking would be absolutely essential for the new laws to work.

“We need to talk about those programs, not just new punishments, and we need to make sure the money is there to pay for them,” she said.

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