I conducted fieldwork and research on the 1999 Swedish criminalisation of the purchase of sex for over 3.5 years. My research involved interviews with numerous respondents, with interviews transcribing at over 400,000 words; I will quote from some respondents illustratively in this submission.

This research was for the purposes of my PhD at the University of Cambridge, which I completed in 2012. The research is presented fully in an academic book, *Criminalising the Purchase of Sex: Lessons from Sweden*, and it has also informed approximately ten academic and advocacy publications.

I currently work for a human rights organisation in London.

**Key points**

- The Swedish Model has had a significant negative impact on the safety of sex workers.
- Contrary to the stated aims to decriminalise the sex workers themselves they are targeted by police, have been consistently evicted from accommodation, have had children removed by the state and migrant sex workers are deported and ‘outed’ as sex workers to the authorities.
- Sex workers have been denied access to health information, harm reduction interventions, and condoms.
- Harm reduction is seen to be incompatible with the so-called Swedish model.
- There have been no demonstrable reductions in the levels of sex work, a principal ambition of the legislation.
- Claims that the law has been a success should be viewed with scepticism due to the failure to achieve its aims and the significant impact it has had on the safety and welfare of sex workers.
1. **Direct Outcomes of the Law: increased danger for street sex workers**

1.1 The law has been used as a way of policing public space to displace sex work from the street, into clandestine space, increasing distance between sex workers and service providers.

1.2 On the law’s introduction, CCTV was installed in areas of street sex work, and police presence increased. This resulted in fewer people being willing to buy sex on the street leading to:

1.2.1 Increased competition.

1.2.2 Prices being pushed down resulting in difficulties negotiating safer sex work.

1.3 Due to being criminalised, clients are unwilling to leave contact information with sex workers, placing sex workers at risk, especially those who need their money more urgently who are not well placed to refuse such clients.

1.4 This is compounded by negotiations being increasingly rushed: clients are agitated and stressed about arrest, and there is less time for sex workers to suss out the situation. As these respondents I interviewed noted:

> “you have to decide if you should go into this person’s car... now... the guy, he will be really scared to pick me up, and he will wave with his hand ‘Come here, we can go here round the corner, and make up the arrangement’, and that would be much more dangerous”.
> (Interview, 2010, Sex Worker [Internet; Escort; Street])

> “when it comes to street workers... they will sometimes have problems negotiating condom (use) because of competition, there are less clients available for them because most good, serious clients think the safest thing to buy sex is from an... indoor worker”.
> (Interview, 2011, Founder of Rose Alliance; Sex Worker)

1.5 Despite these increasing difficulties for sex workers, it is claimed that the law protects sex workers from police interference through criminalising only the purchase of sex, not the sale:

> “the police definitely don’t interfere... because selling is not criminalised...We don’t target the women, or the person in prostitution”.
> (Interview, 2010, Police)

1.5.1 However, there are reports of police targeting sex workers directly.

1.5.2 Police have been known to inform sex workers’ landlords that their tenant sells sex, thus forcing evictions.

1.5.3 Similarly, police report sex workers to hotels and venues, again forcing displacements of sex workers from civil society, like with the policing of street-
based sex work.

1.5.4 Police are also known to prosecute sex workers under pimping legislation for working together for safety, similarly to situations in the UK.

1.5.5 And in stark contrast to police assertions that they do not target sex workers directly, police harass sex workers directly in their own homes:

“they come to my door and, you know, ask for my ID and so forth so it’s like harassment... The third time it’s like, ‘We know what you’re doing, I mean, what you’re about. We’re going to go after your clients’... I make a living out of this, so I was really paranoid for a very long time after”.
(Interview, 2010, Sex Worker)

1.6 Sex workers also face further direct interference from the state in the form of issues with child custody – in fact, sex work is specifically cited as a reason for removal of child custody.

“If you want to be 100 percent safe, you should not have any children in Sweden if you are a prostitute”.
(Interview, 2010, Sex Worker [Internet; Escort; Street])

1.7 Further to all of these laws and policies being used to target sex workers themselves, migrant sex workers – as well as victims of human trafficking – face deportation from Sweden as a matter of standard policy.

1.7.1 In one instance, a sex worker was deported from Sweden with ‘she has not supported herself in an honest manner’ stamped on her deportation order.

1.8 This is a far cry from a law that claims to protect sex workers from state-sponsored interference.

2. Indirect outcomes of the law on service provision/harm reduction

2.1 In terms of some indirect outcomes of the legislation, Sweden’s desire to abolish prostitution that frames the Swedish model has impacted service provision in Sweden.

2.2 Harm reduction is seen in Sweden to be incompatible with the Swedish model: It is seen to legitimise/endorse/encourage sex work.

“harm reduction is many times a way of, I mean it, it tends to keep people in the problem, instead of helping them to leave”.
(Interview, 2009, Social Worker, Stockholm Prostitution Unit)

2.3 As well as condom provision being opposed during outreach work for sex workers and their clients, safer sex selling information is felt to actually encourage sex work:
“maybe some young girls who is not in the prostitution for the moment, they find this on the internet, and say ‘Ah, maybe it could be really safe, because I have this handbook, and I have these things, so nothing could happen’”.
(Interview, 2009, National Coordinator Against Trafficking and Prostitution)

2.4 Moreover, since the Swedish model constructs sex work as a form of violence against women, providing information on how to avoid difficulty during sex work is fatalistically seen by Swedish service providers to be futile:

“prostitution in itself attracts strange people, and I think prostitution has always been, and always will be really, really dangerous... in what way can you help someone then, what kind of information would you give to help people?”
“since my knowledge tells me that prostitution is harmful, it would feel strange to hand out a kit with an alarm... you go off with clients, you know, to, I mean, people get raped anyway”.
(Interview, 2009, Social Worker, Stockholm Prostitution Unit)

2.5 With such little service provision, sex workers have to provide each with condoms on the street and learn how to avoid harm and danger from each other.

3. **A Decline in sex work?**

3.1 Sweden cannot demonstrate to have reduced overall levels of sex work.

3.2 Despite levels of street-based sex work declining immediately following the introduction of the law, levels then increased, and in any case, street sex work is not indicative of overall levels, the vast majority of which are off-street, and hard to measure.

3.3 In short, it is impossible to accurately ascertain current levels of sex work in Sweden.

3.4 The Swedish Board of Health and Welfare concluded in 2008 that “It is difficult to discern any clear trend of development. Has the extent of prostitution increased or decreased? We cannot give any unambiguous answer to that question.”

4. **Conclusions**

4.1 There has been no demonstrable decline in levels of sex work.

4.2 Far from its claim to decriminalise sex workers, the Swedish model, as well as the understandings that frame it, has exacerbated danger and difficulty for sex workers.

4.3 Ongoing claims that the Swedish model is a success should be regarded with scepticism, given the failure of the law to achieve its aim, and given the law’s substantial negative outcomes.