


F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Leana Wen, Commissioner	Health Department MEMO	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201		
	Subject	CB 18-0180 – Police Ordinances – Prohibiting the Purchase of Prostitution		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

February 16, 2018

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill 18-0180 – Police Ordinances – Prohibiting the Purchase of Prostitution. The purpose of this bill is to prohibit the purchase of prostitution, to define the terms, and to establish certain penalties.

Prostitution is the act or practice of engaging in sexual activity with someone for payment. Individuals engaging in prostitution are not a homogenous group. They come from a variety of social, economic, and philosophical backgrounds and work in a range of settings, including streets/cars, massage parlors, brothels, hotels, and bars. In addition, they are often divided into streetwalkers – those who openly solicit on the street – and “call-girls” or “escorts”. Streetwalkers are more likely to be socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged.¹

A large percentage of streetwalkers are physically assaulted, raped, and experience violence in the course of work. There is a **strong link between prostitution and drug and alcohol use**. In addition, **people engaging in prostitution are at increased risk of transmitting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases** such as syphilis and gonorrhea^{2,3}. Studies show that 50% of female sex workers have at least one mental health disorder with mood and anxiety disorders being the most common⁴. There is limited current research on individuals engaging in prostitution in the United States. **Prohibiting the purchase of prostitution will decrease the negative effects sex workers face.**

While persons engaging in prostitution often have significant medical needs, they often struggle to access health care because they do not qualify for health insurance through traditional avenues (employer-based, Medicare, or Medicaid). Furthermore, societal and cultural stigma surrounding sex workers significantly limits access to social support services.

¹ Prostitution and the American Health Care System: Denying Access to a Group of Women in Need. Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice Volume 11.1, September 2013.

² CDC. HIV Risk Among Persons Who Exchange Sex for Money or nonmonetary items. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/sexworkers.html>

³ Understanding the social needs of streetwalking prostitutes. *Social Work*, 41.1, Jan. 1996

⁴ The mental health of female sex workers. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 122.2, Aug. 2010.

BCHD **strongly supports** this legislation, and appreciates the opportunity to discuss this important issue. We will be present at the hearing to answer any questions the Council may have on this matter.