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sex workers, sex, explains, work, victims, law, sex trafficking, april, websites, internet, online, prosecute, forced, jessica, women, selling, consensual sex, act, trafficking, trafficked

SPEAKERS

Sarah Maul

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Sarah Maul 00:02

When we think of sex work, two images come to mind. The first includes women like Eve, who The Daily Beast of April 16, 2018 explains, is a sex worker in California who uses the internet to find customers. The second includes people like Jessica, a 15 year old who was abducted from a party. And according to the Today Show, April 23, 2018, was tortured and sex trafficked for 108 days.

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Sarah Maul 00:32

Both of these stories include sex work, when consensual, and one the nightmare of trafficking. But both of these stories share something significant in common...

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Sarah Maul 00:46

The internet.

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Sarah Maul 00:49

As a sex worker Eve used online ads to sell her services and as a victim. Jessica was rescued through online ads for Pimp Post-it that allowed authorities to track her digital footprint. This complex role that the internet plays in sex work and trafficking, gave rise to a new law.

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Sarah Maul 01:09

FOSTA, which the Washington Post of April 11, 2018, defines as "the allows states and victims to fight online sex trafficking act." This law signed by President Trump last April, aims to prevent sex trafficking by criminalizing online sex work. But it is terribly conceived and poorly written, making both consensual sex

work and sex trafficking illegal online. While the spirit of FOSTA was to protect victims, it has created more victims than it has helped.

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Sarah Maul 01:47

CNN April 18, 2018 clarifies "the internet is the strongest weapon we have to fight against sex trafficking. But misinformation and fear gave birth to a law that targets consensual sex workers and victims alike in devastating ways."

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Sarah Maul 02:05

Today, we will expose how FOSTA fails, the devastating impact of those failures, and solutions.

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Sarah Maul 02:13

Because as sex worker and advocate Weare Ru explained to real clear light in July of 2018. "This legislation is a literal death warrant for the most vulnerable people in the sex trade." The removal of online ads forced women like Eve back into the streets to find work and diminish the possibility of victims like Jessica from ever being found.

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Sarah Maul 02:40

FOSTA fails in two ways. First, it inadvertently targets consensual sex work. And second, it blames the internet for sex trafficking. First, FOSTA was inspired by the 2017 bust of backpage.com. The dominant website for illicit commercial sex MPR April 15, 2018 explains the back page made over \$500 million by advertising and then selling women and children in to sex trafficking. FOSTA was signed to prevent this. But it's a non specific law that neglects the nuances of sex work. it equates voluntary sex work with involuntary kidnapping and sex trafficking, treating them equally. The law states, "anyone could be prosecuted for any online communication that might contribute to sex work." So if I were to solicit sex via email or Facebook Messenger, my consensual act would be prosecuted identically to that of a pimp selling a traffic person.

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Sarah Maul 03:52

Second, FOSTA's misplaced logic assumes that if you control the internet, you end sex trafficking. The previously mentioned Washington Post article explains that the push for FOSTA was fueled by the horror stories from websites like Backpage. These stories were all too real, painting vivid pictures of young girls being forced into trafficking because of online advertisements.

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Sarah Maul 04:18

Slate of April 20, 2018 explained, "through such imagery, the internet became the obvious scapegoat." So policymakers assumed that by ending online advertisements, they would end sex trafficking. But sex trafficking has existed since the dawn of civilization and operates along many different avenues.

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Sarah Maul 04:41

This law just makes victims harder to find by pushing them further out of the public eye. Jessica Raven, Executive Director of the Collective Action for Safe Spaces explained to Motherboard on April 30, 2018, "People are still going to be sex trafficked, they're going to be picked up off the street and forced to sell sex and others will be arrested for just doing what they need to to survive."

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Sarah Maul 05:12

FOSTA has two impacts. First, it makes sex work more dangerous. And second, it pushes trafficking underground. First, FOSTA has dangerous consequences for consensual sex workers who use the internet as a tool to screen customers. These websites allow sex workers to block users, store credit card information, and even to ensure that a John's a John, and not actually a member of a sex trafficking ring. As 29 year old sex worker Airball Raphael explained to the Huffington Post on May 11, 2018. FOSTA is responsible for the murder and rape of sex workers, forcing women to wander the streets looking for Johns, betting on chance, rather than choice As Phoenix escort Melissa explains to the previously mentioned Huffington Post, "this law put me back in the one place that I barely made it out of a live the first time. What do you think the chances are that I make it out alive again?"

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Sarah Maul 06:17

Second, FOSTA forces trafficking further underground. The Washington Times June 30, 2018 explains that FOSTA actually hinders efforts to prosecute predators and to rescue victims. Authorities use these websites to track pimps, find missing children, and to build criminal cases. But these websites are just disappearing. As Jim Brockman, Executive Director of the Freedom Network USA explains to the previously mentioned Washington Post, 'FOSTA forces traffickers to sinister overseas websites outside of us jurisdiction, making it impossible to find and prosecute them.'

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Sarah Maul 07:01

Good Intentions aside, when we prevent these advertisements, we ensure that victims are never found.

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Sarah Maul 07:14

While many critics argue that any form of sex work is demeaning and dangerous to women, Solan April 15 2018, makes it abundantly clear. "Now is not the time to debate the justice of sex work. FOSTA is costing sex workers and victims their lives. So we must act now." First, the Verge June 19, 2018 explains, FOSTA must be amended. This law's broad language must zone in on sex trafficking. This will allow sex workers to post ads for themselves, but will criminalize the act of selling someone else against their will. This change must occur on a legislative level. So I've compiled a list of all the members of The House and the Senate and how they voted. But I didn't want to leave this up to other people. So I collaborated with a legal team to write an amendment to FOSTA.

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Sarah Maul 08:13

Together, we must convince our representatives to sponsor this amendment so that it has a real chance of being passed. I have sent a copy to everyone on this list. But it can't be just me. So give me your name and your information. And if you would like, I'll even send it for you.

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Sarah Maul 08:34

Finally, we must act on the personal level. The sex workers outreach project is a national social justice network that fights for the rights of sex workers. This network has operating chapters across the country. So start one on your campus. I started a chapter on my campus last fall. It was easy to do. But more importantly, our work directly addresses the stigma surrounding sex work. As we held a campus wide event on March 3 for international sex worker rights day, I have copies of the information packets I used to organize the event. And in the packet, you'll find additional information on the sex worker outreach project, my personal contact information, and suggestions for starting your own chapter.

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Sarah Maul 09:23

Please join me in spreading awareness because our fears can no longer allow uninformed laws like Fuasta to do the exact opposite of what it promised.

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Sarah Maul 09:38

The Internet reunited Jessica with her family, and the internet allowed women like Eve to work safely. Today we exposed how FOSTA fails, the devastating impact of those failures, and solutions. We must work together to fix FOSTA because no law should be allowed to sacrifice women's safety under the guise of prevention.