



December 6, 2021

Civil Forfeiture Office, Community Safety and Crime Prevention Branch
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

Sent via email: CFOGrants@gov.bc.ca

Re: Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Funding Stream Name

Dear Civil Forfeiture Granting Team,

We are writing to you from Living in Community Society, a registered non-profit organization based in Vancouver and working across British Columbia. We are very grateful to have received funding from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General for several years now through the Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation granting program.

Centering sex workers' rights, Living in Community convenes diverse stakeholders in order to: understand a range of experiences and perspectives about sex work; inform sex work-related policies and practices of governments, service providers, and community organizations; and provide education and training to support these goals. We focus on root causes including colonization, capitalism, racism, criminalization, and discrimination that create systemic vulnerability for sex workers, and we seek to build understanding and common ground with other community members. Living in Community's staff and Board of Directors include individuals who are experiential in sex work, and our work is driven by the needs and voices of sex workers.

While we appreciate receiving funding through the Civil Forfeiture funding made available to non-profit organizations, in the past several years we have raised concerns about the funding stream names. The stream we have received funding through has experienced several name changes over time, first from 'Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking of Vulnerable Women' in 2013 to 'Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Vulnerable Women in the Sex Trade' in 2020. This name change was the result of dedicated advocacy work to ensure clarity that sex work is different than human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. In June 2020, we raised with the Ministry that this name was still not meeting the needs of funded organizations that focus on ensuring safety for those working in the sex trade. The stream name was then changed in 2021 to 'Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, and Sex Worker Safety.' This was a very welcome change.

However, we want to draw your attention to a continuing concern. In May of 2020, we raised with the Ministry that, in publishing its list of funded projects for 2019/2020, the name of the funding stream was shortened to just 'Human Trafficking' when no other funding stream names were similarly shortened. Though likely an oversight, calling the stream just 'Human Trafficking' was an inaccurate name for some of the grant recipients, including Living in Community, and reinforced the problematic conflation of sex work with human trafficking. After sharing our concerns with the Ministry, Ministry staff edited the file to include the full granting stream name, rectifying this issue. However, shortly thereafter we received a letter of congratulations from our local MLA, the Honourable Adrian Dix; in that letter, the funding stream name was also shortened to 'Human Trafficking.' We sent a letter to Minister Dix



outlining why, though again likely an oversight, the shortening of the stream name had significant consequences.

Unfortunately, in the recent mid-term reporting sent to funding recipients for 2020/2021 funding, the stream name was again shortened to just 'Human Trafficking.' No other stream name was shortened in this reporting in a way that removed entire sections of its scope; only Child and Youth Advocacy Centres was also shortened, and it was shortened to 'CYAC.' As the full stream name is 'Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, and Sex Worker Safety,' shortening the name to just one of those three areas for this reporting erases two thirds of the projects that have been funded and conflates all this funded work with human trafficking.

As noted, we understand that these errors are likely oversights in staff administration. However, for several years now we have repeatedly raised that conflation like these contribute to further harms, stigma, violence, and lack of appropriate services and supports for sex workers, which is why projects like ours continue to be needed. From our work over the past 17 years, we know that there are many misunderstandings about sex work which can have a dangerous impact on policy and funding priorities. Trafficking is a serious offence and must be dealt with as such; at the same time, sexual exploitation and safety for sex workers are also very different issues and must be understood to be different in order to be addressed effectively.

While we know that the provincial government is committed to funding initiatives to end gender-based violence, trafficking, and sexual assault, still very little funding is available for individuals engaged in sex work who have not been trafficked but who do experience violence. Moreover, much of the available funding goes to programs that only support sex workers in exiting sex work. Many individuals are not in a place to or do not want to exit sex work, yet they still have a fundamental right to safety and security.

For the past two years, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services has acknowledged this in its reports on the government's annual budget consultations. In its Budget 2021 Report, the Committee recommended that the government "[p]rovide support programs and services that promote the safety and security of all individuals who engage in sex work, regardless of gender, circumstance or type of sex work, without the sole focus being on exiting or human-trafficking services."¹ In its Budget 2022 Report, the Committee repeated this recommendation, with the important addition that these support programs and services should receive "increased and ongoing" funding.²

Part of Living in Community's work includes providing education and training for those whose professional work or personal lives bring them into contact with sex workers. The training examines individual, organizational and societal beliefs, values and understandings of sex work, as well as how these impact the delivery of support services and also sex workers' access to services. We would be happy to provide training or educational resources to your staff as requested, and to discuss this matter further with you and your staff if you have additional questions or comments.

¹ *Report on the Budget 2021 Consultation – Volume I*. Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/41st-parliament/5th-session/fgs/Reports/Budget%202021%20Consultation%20Report_Volume%20I.pdf

² *Report on the Budget 2022 Consultation*. Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/42nd-parliament/2nd-session/fgs/budget-consultation/42-2-2_FGS-Report_Budget-2022-Consultation.pdf



Living in
Community

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters. While language choices may seem small, it is not just semantics. Conflating sex work and trafficking has very serious consequences both for people who are trafficked and for sex workers.

Sincerely,

Halena Seiferling
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