



Living in
Community

February 8, 2024

Sent via email: mayorandcouncillors@richmond.ca

Re: Crackdown endangering massage parlour workers

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

We are getting in touch from Living in Community (LIC), a non-profit and charity based in Vancouver that works with organizations across British Columbia.

Centering sex workers' rights, we convene diverse stakeholders in order to: understand a range of experiences and perspectives; 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 of issues including colonization, capitalism, criminalization, racism, and discrimination that create systemic vulnerability for sex workers, and we seek to build understanding and common ground with other community members.

We have serious concerns about the safety of women working at massage businesses in Richmond after the Community Safety Committee decided to increase bylaw enforcement at these establishments.

These inspections will only push women underground, to apartments and condominiums where they are more at risk of violence. As representatives aiming to keep constituents safe, you cannot ignore evidence that shows women engaged in sex work are safer when they're working together at licensed commercial businesses.

As we have shared with you previously, the root causes of violence and vulnerability are poverty, criminalization, colonization, racism, and systemic barriers to accessing services. If City Council is concerned about the safety and security of sex workers, we encourage a human rights-based approach of upholding workers' rights and removing barriers to workers accessing the services, programs, and supports that they choose for themselves.

SWAN Vancouver, who we have worked closely with for many years, supports many women engaged in sex work in Richmond and has noted several workers have left massage parlours after being present at "traumatic" enforcement operations. The organization said workers reported a heavy handed RCMP presence, blocking of doors and detaining individuals during the inspections, among other things. We urge you to think about how these recent raids have inadvertently replicated the harms you say you want to prevent or address.



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Many of the women engaged in sex work in Richmond are immigrants and newcomers who already face stigma and criminalization because of Canada's prostitution laws. We are urging you to learn about the women working at massage parlours, accept the choices they've made for themselves and stop the heightened enforcement at their workplaces. These women are members of your community, Richmond is their home, and they deserve the same compassion, respect and protection as any other resident.

We would appreciate a reply at your earliest convenience.

Best regards,

Halena Seiferling
Executive Director, Living in Community