

contacttracinginquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Inquiry into the Victorian Governments COVID-19 contact tracing system and testing regime.

Dear Sirs,
Attention Fiona Patten and Legal and Social Issues Committee,

I write to you today as a legally licensed operator of twenty-eight years in the state of Victoria. I want to strongly raise to you, my level of concern and bring your attention to an issue that as a legitimately licensed operator in the sex industry an issue that I see as a public health risk - privately operating sex workers!

These private sex workers are often not able to get work at registered agencies because they are usually drug dependent. They often engage in risk-taking behaviour and are willing to compromise their health and safety and that of their clients to do anything for monetary compensation. They tend to be driven by their immediate needs which can take precedent over other considerations such as their own health or the safety of those around them.

A substantial amount of private sex workers are stuck in the compromising position of working alone and isolated from other sex workers as they can be under the "protection" of their partner - a partner that can definitely be of a sinister nature.

In a lot of these cases, private sex work can be forced or heavily coerced to "produce the money" as it were.

The very nature of private work is risky with little or no regard for their own safety or the safety of others.

Private sex workers often see 8-10 clients per day up close and personal, by which we mean the strict use of condoms may not be adhered to let alone masks!

There is a high likely hood that there will be little to no record of clients - due to the available anonymity that private sex work offers to both the private sex worker themselves and that of the client due to it being unregulated. This would make contract tracing would be nearly impossible or blatantly impossible.

This lack of record-keeping can be explained by the fact that record keeping is done in preparation of records for the ATO - the lack of these records is predominantly done for the ease of not engaging with the ATO.

This is crucial as it will translate into concealing the true records of whom they have been in contact with and this poses a major public health risk.

As private sex workers simply have the option to simply not report whom they have been in contact with this causes a major risk as we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic that "mystery cases" have caused monumental risk to public health.

My dealings with DHHS when they asked for input to prepare a COVID-19 safe plan for the sex industry, where I saw and realised the familiarity and the level of comfort between DHHS staff and the representative body groups of individual sex workers which highlighted to me that DHHS had chosen to reach out to and deal with NSW based private worker outreach groups INSTEAD OF AN ACTUAL OWNER and it was abundantly clear that these two groups had, had prior meetings before realising that they might actually need to reach out an owner in the City Of Melbourne for over 30 years.

I am still coming to terms with the fact that DHHS placed more value on interstate lobby groups for input and left the inclusion of owners until the last possible minute. This simply means that DHHS up until this point had only been aware of half the picture and I just worry if anyone at DHHS has been appraised of just how many and how risky the existence of private sex workers are.

As a registered and legitimate business, we operate completely differently from that of private sex workers. In our business, before any sex worker employed by us is sent to a client several cross-checks are done for safety INCLUDING DRIVERS LICENCE.

We have been doing this for numerous years and are very experienced in this.

This practice of correct record keeping is done to ensure the safety of our sex workers, our staff and our clients.

We do not have to alter any of our current record-keeping practices to make contract tracing possible.

We undertook our own contact tracing here AND FOUND WE COULD REACH OUT TO AND COMPLETE 32 PEOPLE FULL CIRCLE IN 3 DAYS and then seven days to collate all test results from everyone that we had identified from our own contact tracing from our side and relayed the outcome of those test results back -it was really two days but the last person was away and off the air.

Our driver tested positive he informed, he informed them that he was a driver for an escort agency - he informed us immediately which is why we undertook this tracing on our own and TO DATE WE HAVE STILL NOT BE CONTACTED BY DHHS in a period exceeding eight months. The building in which we operate from was notified that a tenant's visitor had tested positive for COVID-19. In turn, that business was closed and cleaning took place again no contact from DHHS what-so-ever to the extent that the body corp for the building has contacted DHHS twice in a vain attempt to follow up.

The Victorian Government, law enforcement, and the Health Department all have a no-tolerance policy for illicit drug dependency or use and the very apparent use of illicit drugs amongst private sex workers brazenly contradicts this. This blasé attitude that a multitude of private sex workers has towards the strict laws against illicit substances is not only illegal it is also risk-taking that affects private sex workers, their clients, and the ability to keep correct records of whom they have been in contact with.

The BLA has over 5000 registered independent private sex workers that we know of (there may a great deal more than that but the BLA will not release figures).

The BLA has not kept the records of these registered independent private sex workers up to date - this has encouraged and provided a smokescreen for the illegal component of the sex industry. - which has operated freely without restrictions throughout the entirety of the Victorian COVID-19 lockdown.

The BLA were unresponsive for the first 4 months of this pandemic, not bothering to reach out to us the industry stakeholders, we received NO CONTACT, SUPPORT OR INFORMATION despite us continuously emailing them.

The staff at the BLA did not know what to do on one occasion I was asked can you please call back tomorrow when “ ___redacted___ ” is here as I do not know how to work this system and I do not know how to take your payment.

Unbelievable the tone-deaf BLA had the temerity to charge me \$297.00 as an application fee to apply to extend the payment due date of my licence despite this being May 2020 in the very heart of the pandemic. The BLA had full knowledge that we were not operational at this time.

The BLA's inaction and inertia and the attitude of the staff (who were enjoyed receiving a continuous weekly wage) were unhelpful exacerbated the problems faced by a licensed paying operator.

The BLA by inaction and the lack of care to be involved missed an opportunity to support and shore up and help possibly with the dissemination of information the very license holders that they draw their funds from.

The performance of the BLA and the attitude of this staff during the darkest days of this pandemic can only be described as poor at best.

Even when we tried to hand in our license this owner received discriminatory and unreasonable treatment and was brought to legitimate tears at the reception of Exhibition St DoJ.

It is hard to see any good points or find a valid reason for the existence of the defunct, in an operational dinosaur that is the BLA.

The existence of the registered yet unregulated private sex workers in Victoria has created massive advertising platforms through which the illegal sex workers can survive and flourish unchecked. These private sex workers that have continued to advertise across numerous online platforms in-person sex work throughout the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions created and continue to pose the threat of creating the perfect storm for another COVID-19 outbreak.

Private sex workers can interact with returned travellers, have no contract tracing, have drug dependency issues, and be up close and personal with many clients a week and possibly not taking health and safety protocols seriously.

Please for the sake of Victoria don't allow this to happen, CHO we implore you to take a stand against the wild wild west parties in this State! We have paid too high a price for an innumerable amount of international students to return to the state of Victoria and resume private illegal sex work, using online advertising platforms and close down this great state all over again.

Your health department may already be aware of this through clinic attendance demographics

Below is a list of examples of advertising platforms used by registered private and Illegals sex workers - updated 10/11/20: when Melbourne supposedly still in half lockdown!

Locanto MELBOURNE ONLY ADS (NOT COUNTRY) 1561

Backpage MELB ONLY ADS (NOT COUNTRY) 125

Adposta MELBOURNE ONLY ADS(NOT COUNTRY) 96

Tryst MELBOURNE ONLY ADS (NOT COUNTRY) 195

Escorts &Babes MELBOURNE ONLY ADS (NOT COUNTRY) 210

ESCORTIFY MELBOURNE ONLY(NOT COUNTRY) 228

REAL BABES MELBOURNE ONLY (NOT COUNTRY) 93

CRACKER MELBOURNE ONLY (NOT COUNTRY) 2072

BUDGET ESCORT MELBOURNE ONLY (NOT COUNTRY) 1000

Total Melbourne only 10/11/20, on the very day DHHS meets with Stakeholders of LEGAL LICENCE PAYING (\$12000 P/A) sex Industry to discuss and plan a covid safe return to work! -- TOTAL \$5580--

NOTE Even the Herald Sun carried one ad for an XE private sex worker during total Lockdown!

The registered so-called independent sex workers have caused an unfortunate blurring of the lines between the legal and illegal components of the sex industry.

This blurring of the lines has given rise to a string of competition in the sex industry that meaning these private and illegal sex workers are compelled to go further and perhaps jeopardize more health rules and regulations and take more risks to win the work.

There is a much higher risk and instance of unprotected sex with Privates as they do not have an Agency to explain the necessary use of them or defend the use of them to clients and so we feel that face masks will not even be a consideration.

There is already pressure in the inquiries that we have received from clients stating; "Do I/ do YOU have to wear a mask".

The DHHS must take responsibility for the gaping contact tracing blackhole and possible future health tragedy that is being flagged here and step in to remove the tier of independent workers from the BLA - all sex work must be through registered legal licensed operators in the State Of Victoria.

Private and illegal sex workers expose themselves and the rest of the public to much more harm due to being isolated in their independence and they have MUCH LESS ACCESS TO HEALTH MESSAGING -example when was it possible for the health nurse or the DHHS to reach out to registered girls with ANY literature?

Our Agency can employ direct face to face and mass text messaging and we distribute our own in the absence of anything from the Health Dept and we make our own posters!

No Health updates have been applied to the illegal and private sex workers throughout the entirety of the eight months of Victorian lockdown and the State Of Disaster.

Private and illegal sex workers have proceeded to operate with impunity.

Private sex workers can come in as students and may belong to or be beholden to sex trafficking organisations directly from our Asian neighbours and other high-risk COVID-19 countries.

Private sex workers do not have any regulations on COVID-19 based cleaning and hygiene measures to adhere to and are running the risk of spreading an outbreak.

Our elder clients have been pressuring us for months to send our employees to them despite them being located in aged care facilities and we know that privates sex workers can just go straight in visit in aged care and assisted living /retirement villages. We will not do it and due to us refusing they are ringing around to see which private sex worker they can get and those private sex workers can go in undetected. This could have serious consequences for all of us.

Clients provided us with instructions to get into retirement homes via car parks to circumvent guards and reception and cameras.

Clients also gave us the instructions to get in the Towers at Flemington and Carlton while they were in total lockdown and on the news! We told them not to do it but we know they kept ringing around to find their sexual service providers. The instructions involved getting in undetected and evading the cameras and police on site until the client collected them.

There are no checks and balances on the individuals and the existence of Private so-called independent Sex workers must now be reviewed in the light of a possible future outbreak of COVID-19 or other pandemic or major public health concerns.

A private sex worker with the best intentions in the world will not reveal a client's details to the Health Department (if she even has them) after he has visited them at their residence AND KNOWS WHERE THEY LIVE!

Many private sex workers will not go for COVID-19 testing for purely financial reasons and many are simply being stood over and have to keep working.

Private sex workers and the registration of Private sex workers can only be seen as a failure in this State as there is no evidence that the BLA has been able to keep accurate records (we are sure their numbering system is incorrect) of this group and your inquiry should be able to determine why their numbering system is not representative of the numbers of registered sex workers.

The very existence of Registered Independents sex workers with their notions of legality and yet nil monitoring allows for the massive flourishing of the illegal sex workers and it is a failed experiment-take away the independent sex workers and you kill the advertising boards used by illegal sex workers in this State. The examples I quoted above only relate to CBD Melbourne on one given day -there are just as many more ads for suburbs and then many more for the country regions.

This cohort is notoriously difficult to track or trace in normal times let alone in the midst of a global pandemic. We must point out the enormous risk the existence of registered so-called "Independent sex workers" pose to the State in the face of the greatest health challenge of our time and we wish to strongly support and advocate for the abolition of independent sex workers and the attendant problems that could be faced when trying to trace and quickly contain an outbreak of COVID-19 or future pandemics in our great State.