

ISSUE BRIEF

ON
Prostitution and
Incarceration

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RHODE ISLAND FAMILY LIFE CENTER

The Rhode Island Family Life Center increases community safety by supporting and advocating for ex-offenders and their families.

841 Broad Street
Providence, Rhode
Island
02907

PHONE
401.781.5808

FAX
401.781.5361

www.ri-familylifecenter.org

Prostitution and Incarceration in Rhode Island

In Rhode Island the criminalization, arrest, and incarceration of prostitutes is currently the central focus of efforts to decrease prostitution. These prostitutes are generally poor or homeless, have substance abuse problems, are the victims of physical and sexual violence, and want to leave prostitution.

- **107 women were incarcerated in 2006**
- **In contrast, 2 “Johns” were incarcerated**
- **Reforming RI’s prostitution laws would reduce the RI female prison population by at least 15%.**
- **RI could save at least \$440,000 by not putting women working as prostitutes in jail or prison**
- **A diversionary program for all women currently being imprisoned for prostitution similar to Adult Drug Court would cost approximately \$350,000.**

Other states and countries have adopted policies that result in much less or no incarceration of women for prostitution and that focus on diversion or providing social services to help women leave prostitution.

Any legislation that is passed to try to decrease prostitution in Rhode Island:

- **Should not increase the criminalization of prostitutes by expanding the definition of criminal prostitution**
- **Should not require women who are being human trafficked to be arrested and imprisoned**
- **Should use funds currently being spent to incarcerate women for prostitution to fund diversionary and social service programs as well as police education programs that will change police attitudes towards women working as prostitutes.**

Both H5355 and the legislation drafted by the city of Providence would expand the definition of prostitution and result in more women arrested and imprisoned.