



August 8, 2024

Re: Proposal of SODA and SOAP Legislation

Dear Members of the Seattle City Council:

We are writing to urge you to oppose two new Council legislative proposals:

- Stay Out of Drug Areas (SODA zones); and to
- Reinstate the previously-overturned ban on “prostitution loitering” and establishment of Stay Out of Area of Prostitution (SOAP).

Legislation to reinstate the previously-overturned ban on “prostitution loitering” and establishment of Stay Out of Area of Prostitution will only cause harm. The legislation claims to disrupt sex trafficking, but it focuses on punishing victims of human trafficking, rather than traffickers, and simultaneously causes harm to autonomous sex workers. **Criminalizing and punishing sex workers with jail time and/or \$5,000 fine, can jeopardize their housing, income, mental health and very livelihoods.** As [Publicola reports](#), sharing Councilmember Moore’s reasoning for this legislation, “Prostitution may not go away entirely, but “they will no longer be here, which is the main thing that we’re looking for— to create safety for this community.”

It seems like this legislation seeks to hide the issue, rather than addressing it or protecting people from sex trafficking. If Councilmember Moore wants to create and protect young people from being trafficked, the legislation needs to focus on the people truly causing harm, preventing sex trafficking, and protecting victims, not on punishing victims and creating false equivalence between autonomous sex work and sex trafficking. There are no steps to healing and to addressing root causes and holding the pimps/human traffickers accountable, rather punishing and hiding the victims.

Looking at the legislation that would establish two new SODA zones, Davison stated at a press conference that this legislation was about protecting residents, workers, and visitors, this legislation will clearly do the opposite, and we have Seattle’s past experience with SODAs as proof. As [Publicola notes](#), previous designation of SODA zones did not “clean up” areas with frequent drug activity; they only deepened the city’s criminalization of poverty and contributed to racial disparities rampant in our legal system that disproportionately affect Black and brown people. **This law was, in fact, overturned by City Council in 2020, for this exact reason.**

Davison calls this legislation an “exit ramp” – our Commission has to wonder where the

Seattle Renter’s Commission

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exit ramp is meant to lead. Without connecting folks to housing, case managers, and support centers, this “exit ramp” is just an attempt to ignore the problem, rather than addressing the root causes of it. That this Council would even consider banning people from simply existing in certain areas of the city, particularly given that even being charged (not convicted) of such a crime would be cause for banning someone, is tremendously concerning.

This legislation is being written without the people that it says it is meant for. The language Moore and Davison have used suggests that their focus is on helping people, but without centering the people affected – including victims of sex trafficking and people who do not have the resources they need to get out of drug addiction – this cannot happen. Rather than inventing harmful legislation that doesn't consider people's lived experiences, Council members need to build trust and community with the people who are in these areas and ask them what they actually need to heal and thrive. If the goal is to show them they are worthy, it's time to ask these communities themselves: How can we make you feel worthy? Furthermore, **we need to focus on sustainable change and not on repeating cycles of oppression.** We suggest that Council go back to the drawing board, have conversations with the people in these affected communities, and start developing solutions that truly center these communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

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