

VCASE Calls on Vancouver Police Department to Uphold Federal Law on Sex-Buying Under PCEPA

Vancouver, BC — The Vancouver Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation (VCASE) is raising serious concerns about the Vancouver Police Department’s newly updated Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines (2025), which continue to omit a central pillar of Canada’s federal prostitution law: the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services.

While advocates of the “sex industry” complained in a July 31 Vancouver Sun article that the VPD’s guidelines increase the risk of harm to prostituted persons, VCASE says the real risk comes from the VPD’s continued failure to enforce federal law which, in turn, would reduce demand.

“Enforcing the law is the key to improving safety,” says survivor and VCASE media spokesperson Trisha Baptie, “not turning a blind eye to buyers who are blatantly breaking it.”

The VPD acknowledges the dangers faced by prostituted persons and identifies high-risk situations involving violence, exploitation, trafficking, youth, and organized crime. But enforcement of PCEPA is not a priority for the VPD.

This position, VCASE argues, directly contradicts the intent and structure of the federal Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA).

Enacted in 2014 following the Supreme Court of Canada’s Bedford decision, PCEPA recognizes prostitution as a form of sexual exploitation that disproportionately harms women and girls. Parliament’s stated objectives are clear:

Protect those who sell their own sexual services;

Protect communities—especially children—from the harms associated with prostitution;

Reduce the demand for prostitution and its incidence.

The law accomplishes these goals by criminalizing the purchase of sex, the advertising of sexual services, and third-party profiteering, while shielding prostituted persons themselves from criminal liability. Demand reduction is not an optional feature of PCEPA—it is its core mechanism for protecting vulnerable individuals and communities.

“By declining to enforce the prohibition on sex-buying, the VPD is effectively removing the central tool Parliament created to reduce exploitation,” said Baptie. “Stopping demand is the most effective way to increase safety for prostituted persons. When buyers face no consequences, exploitation flourishes.”

VCASE notes that police agencies across Canada have an obligation to enforce federal law. While police discretion is an important part of public-interest decision-making, discretion cannot nullify the purpose of legislation.

The VPD’s enforcement guidelines describe the document as a “living document,” intended to evolve as courts issue rulings on constitutional challenges. Yet the guidelines do not reflect one of the most significant judicial affirmations of PCEPA to date: the 2023 Ontario Superior Court decision *Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform v. Canada*, authored by Justice Robert Goldstein.

Justice Goldstein upheld the constitutionality of PCEPA in its entirety, affirming Parliament’s right to treat prostitution as a form of exploitation and to reduce demand through criminal sanctions on buyers.

His ruling emphasized that the law’s structure is rational, protective, and consistent with Canada’s commitments to gender equality. Goldstein wrote that PCEPA “targets the exploitative aspects of prostitution” and that its demand-reduction model is “a valid legislative choice aimed at protecting the vulnerable.” This judicial endorsement directly supports VCASE’s position that enforcement of sex-buying laws is not only constitutional but essential.

“Justice Goldstein’s decision makes it clear that PCEPA stands on firm legal ground,” Baptie stated. “The VPD should align its enforcement practices with both the law and the courts’ interpretation of it.”

VCASE is calling on the Vancouver Police Department to revise its guidelines to explicitly recognize and enforce the criminalization of sex-buying. Doing so would bring the guidelines into compliance with federal legislation, reflect current jurisprudence, and strengthen protections for those most vulnerable to exploitation.

“Supporting the enforcement of PCEPA is not merely a legal matter—it is a matter of societal health,” Baptie emphasized. “Communities are safer when exploitation is reduced, when vulnerable women and girls are protected, and when demand is addressed directly.”

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The Vancouver Collective Against Sexual Exploitation (vcase.ca) is a community-based organization dedicated to ending all forms of sexual exploitation through advocacy, education, and survivor-centred support. We work to advance policies that reduce demand, protect vulnerable people, and promote a society where no one is bought or sold.