

April 15, 2026



STATEMENT: Community organizations alarmed after City of Vancouver cuts essential Sex Work Social Planner position

“Due to the a loss of the missing and murdered women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, and the continued violence and stigma against sex workers (consistently reported by sex worker-serving organizations through local bad date lists and outreach programs), we are committed to developing progressive and compassionate approaches with law enforcement, and health and social service partners to increase awareness, minimize social harm and implement inclusive policies and practices for sex workers in Vancouver.” — [Brief to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights](#), House of Commons. Submitted by City of Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. June 25, 2014.

WISH Drop-In Centre Society, PACE Society, SWAN Vancouver, Living in Community Society, and RainCity Housing are deeply disappointed to hear that the City of Vancouver has eliminated one of two Sex Work Social Planner positions. These roles were created to prevent violence, reduce vulnerability and strengthen communication and relationships between sex workers, police, community organizations and the City. They were a direct recommendation from [Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry](#), which specifically called for the City of Vancouver to “create and fund two community-based liaison positions.”

Sex Work Social Planners have worked closely with our organizations for years. With the elimination of one of these positions, the City loses vital expertise and capacity that has demonstrably improved safety and trust between sex workers and public institutions.

This loss also comes at a time when support organizations are reporting an [increase in violence](#) against sex workers and a decrease in sex work-specific support services, and despite Vancouver City Council recently approving a motion to develop a gender-based violence prevention strategy and task force. We are only two months away from the City of Vancouver hosting FIFA World Cup 2026 matches, which comes with additional risks of sex workers being displaced from street-based work, and/or disconnected to services due to a heightened police presence and surveillance across the city.

“The City of Vancouver's decision to eliminate one of two Sex Work Social Planner positions is a profound and surprise betrayal of sex workers, especially Indigenous street-based sex workers in the DTES and the entire WISH community. These positions grew from the catastrophic failure of authorities to listen and respond to women made vulnerable by oppressive policies and practices. The City committed to do better; it has now broken that commitment and done so without consultation or notice. In a sentence, it has chosen to save money over lives.” — **Kara Gillies, Executive Director, WISH Drop-In Centre Society**

“Reduction in sex worker safety efforts, including this position at the City, has grave and significant impacts on already systemically marginalized sex workers. Im/migrant women engaged in sex work have experienced one of the most violent years in recent history. We’ve seen a troubling rise in Abuser Alerts related to violence and safety concerns, as well as increasingly punitive law enforcement activities. Eliminating this position that sex workers rely on for safety is completely unjustifiable.” – **Angela Wu, Executive Director, SWAN Vancouver**

“The City of Vancouver must reaffirm its responsibility to the community and take meaningful steps to repair the harm that has been caused. The elimination of one of the Sex Work City planner positions sends a clear and troubling message: that sex workers across diverse backgrounds as well as DTES community members and essential services, are being deprioritized and put at risk. This decision does not exist in isolation; it reflects a broader pattern of increasing neglect and violence. We are calling on the City of Vancouver to stop ignoring these realities and to commit to saving lives with immediate permanent funding for sex worker-led initiatives and supports.” – **Skyla Barahona, Project Coordinator, PACE Society**

“The elimination of one of only two Sex Work Social Planner positions is more than a staffing change—it signals a troubling deprioritization of sex workers’ safety, dignity, and lived expertise at a critical time. These roles have been essential bridges between the City and community, shaping responsive, accountable policies grounded in real needs. We are not only disappointed but alarmed, as this undermines years of collaboration and weakens the very systems meant to support community safety and well-being. We urge the City to reconsider and to meaningfully invest in the people and infrastructure that uphold public health, human rights, and community integrity.” – **Steph Sia, Co-Chair, Living in Community Society**

“RainCity Housing stands firm in its belief in the inherent value of this critical position for sex worker safety in Vancouver. These positions are key to having a collaborative relationship with the City of Vancouver and demonstrate its commitment to supporting some of the city’s most vulnerable voices. We hope that the city will reconsider this decision and keep sex worker safety at the centre of the future planning and services.”
– **Amelia Ridgway, Program Director, RainCity Housing**

The City of Vancouver was once regarded as a progressive leader in sex work safety — it submitted a joint letter to the House of Commons about the proven harms of proposed sex work laws, implemented municipal Sex Work Response Guidelines, and established two dedicated Sex Work Social Planner roles. The lessons of *Forsaken*, court rulings, numerous academic studies, and the experiences of sex workers are clear — law enforcement, institutions, and governments have failed to protect sex workers. These facts don’t just live in records and evidence, they continue in the everyday reality of community members. Today, the City appears to be following a troubling trend across all levels of government: the quiet erosion of sex work safety initiatives and the abandonment of the recommendations in *Forsaken*.

We call on the City of Vancouver to reaffirm and demonstrate its commitment to sex worker safety by immediately reinstating this critical position and ensuring that the longstanding relationships and trust built between City staff and sex workers are maintained.