



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Vancouver Police Department guts Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines, erasing community input

xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) territory/Vancouver, B.C - The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) has gutted its [Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines](#) and, without consultation, erased the input of community organizations that shaped the [original policy](#). Our organizations were not notified of the updated guidelines, which remove key procedures for responding when sex workers report crimes. The document also places a greater emphasis on exploitation and trafficking, signalling a move away from prioritizing sex workers' health, safety, and rights.

"The original VPD guidelines, although imperfect, were an attempt to change police behaviours, biases, and enforcement tactics that allowed a serial killer to murder dozens of Indigenous and sex working women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. WISH is alarmed that the explicit recognition of the unique marginalization and subsequent vulnerability of sex workers in the DTES has been removed from the current guidelines, effectively erasing this history and risking further over-policing and under-protecting of our community." - **Kara Gillies, Executive Director, WISH Drop-In Centre Society**

Frontline organizations are also pointing to the failures of the VPD Sex Industry Liaison Officer position. Officers in this role continue to ignore calls from sex workers seeking to report violence, while the VPD promotes the liaison officer as evidence of its commitment to sex worker safety.

"A 2020 [peer-reviewed study](#) by our team found that among sex workers in Metro Vancouver who experienced violence, only 26% reported the incident to police. The updated VPD Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines risk further eroding sex workers' access to justice and ability to report violence to police." - **Dr. Andrea Krüsi, Assistant Professor, SFU School of Criminology CARE & AESHA Study**

The VPD's decision not to consult the sex worker community has resulted in key procedures being removed. For example, when sex workers report being victims of a crime, the guidelines no longer state that:

- An officer should be assigned to investigate
- The timeliness of a report does not lessen the seriousness of the incident or affect police response
- If the incident occurred in another city, officers should make a timely referral to the correct police agency
- Officers should inquire if the person is connected to any support services

“The erasure of the legal context of sex work in ‘Canada,’ the history of sex work in the Downtown Eastside, and minimizing the impacts of colonization on Indigenous sex workers is deeply disappointing. While the previous guidelines were created with assistance from five organizations that are by and for sex workers, this collaboration has been abandoned. This decision de-centers the autonomy of sex workers, inaccurately frames most sex workers as exploited, and relies singularly on the sex industry liaison officer who has been reported to be largely ineffective, if responsive at all. These guidelines send the message that the safety and rights of thousands of sex workers do not matter to the VPD, especially those seemingly added as an afterthought or completely omitted, such as im/migrant, Two-Spirit, trans, and gender diverse, and Indigenous sex workers.” - **Caroline Doerksen & Leaf Henderson, PACE Society Board Members**

“Research with sex workers in Vancouver has consistently shown that police presence and enforcement of sex work laws are significant barriers to sex workers’ safety strategies and access to resources. On the other hand, access to sex worker-led supports improve sex workers’ overall health and safety. Rather than additional investments in the VPD, sex workers in Vancouver deserve increased support for community-led and non-carceral services.” - **Dr. Jennie Pearson, Postdoctoral Fellow, SFU School of Criminology, CARE & AESHA Study**

The revised guidelines place greater emphasis on exploitation, conflating sex work with both human trafficking and criminality while failing to meet the needs of either group. Sex workers and their allies are concerned that the guidelines encourage police to approach all sex workers as victims of exploitation, rather than prioritizing their occupational health, safety, and rights. The language is shifting at the same time police forces, including the BC RCMP Counter Human Trafficking Unit, are [targeting sex work](#).

“For years, police have used anti-trafficking efforts as an excuse to carry out enforcement in the form of workplace raids, undercover operations, and immigration arrests that target im/migrants engaged in sex work. Our community rarely turns to the police for support when they experience assaults or robberies, but when they have tried to report violence, officers routinely ignore their concerns, focusing instead on finding pimps and traffickers that don’t exist. Far more often than not, they find themselves arrested, detained, or deported after trying to seek justice.” - **Angela Wu, Executive Director, SWAN Vancouver**

We condemn the VPD’s revised Sex work Enforcement Guidelines and the Sex Industry Liaison Officer position. Vancouver police are using these broken mechanisms to portray a false image of their commitment to sex worker safety. Our organizations are calling for the VPD to prioritize safety, health and rights over enforcement, reduce investment in the VPD Sex Industry Liaison Officer, and stop the conflation of sex work with trafficking.

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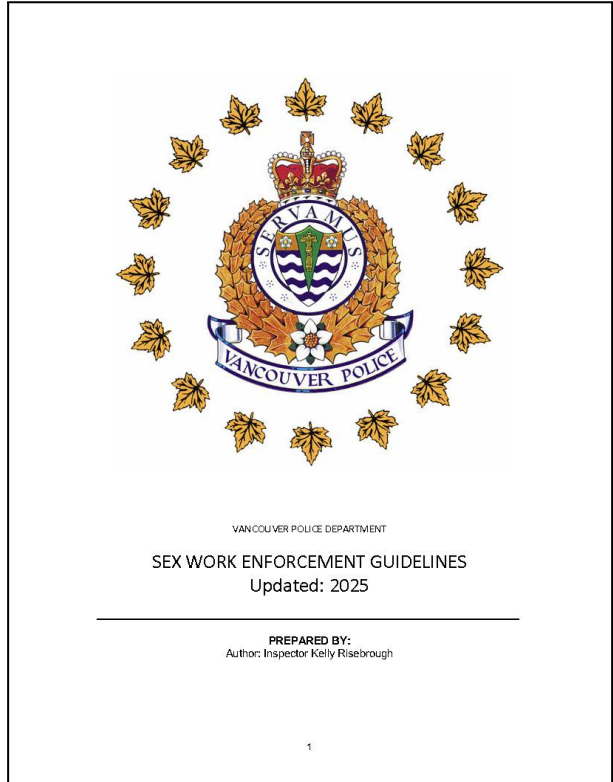
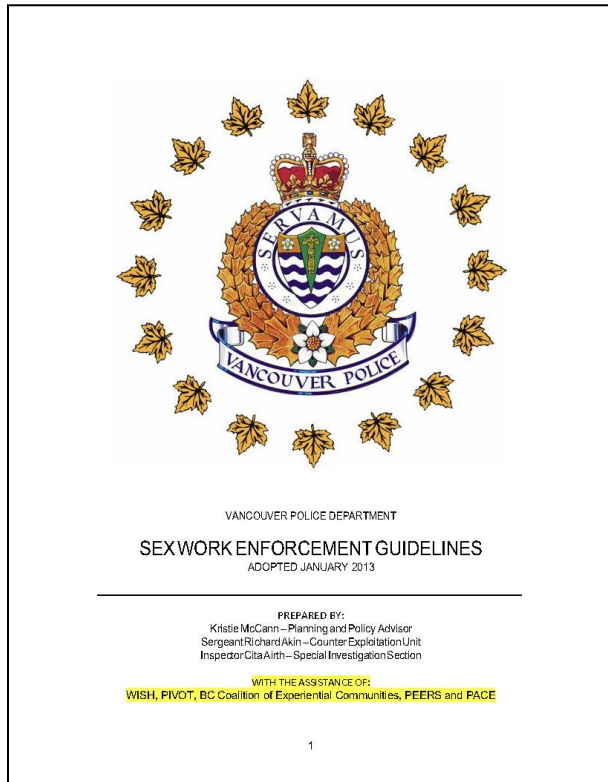
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IMAGES:

The front covers of the [original](#) and [updated](#) Sex Work Enforcement Guidelines



ABOUT:

[WISH Drop-In Centre Society](#) For over 40 years WISH Drop-In Centre has been a safe space for street-based sex workers in the DTES and a critical point of contact for essential services and peer support.

[PACE Society](#) is a peer-driven organization located in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver that provides support, advocacy, and education by, with, and for current and former sex workers.

[SWAN Vancouver](#) promotes the rights, health, and safety of im/migrant women and gender diverse people engaged in indoor sex work through frontline service and systemic advocacy.

[The CARE Study](#) is a community-based research study housed at Simon Fraser University, focused on exploring evolving criminal and legal approaches, impacts of health equity & community-led responses.

[The AESHA Study](#) is a longitudinal community-based research project housed at the University of British Columbia, focused on sex workers occupational health, safety and rights.

[Pivot Legal Society](#) is a leading Canadian human rights organization that uses the law to address the root causes of poverty and social exclusion in Canada. Pivot's work includes challenging laws and policies that force people to the margins of society and keep them there. Since 2002 Pivot has won major victories for sex workers' rights, police accountability, affordable housing, and health and drug policy.