

University of Rhode Island

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Senate Prostitution Bill Weakens Law

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Senate Prostitution Bill Weakens the Law House Has Been the Leader on Closing the Loophole

Jim Meyen, member of Citizens Against Trafficking, wrote the following letter to the editor of the Newport Daily News. It was published on September 9, 2009 (Page A-7). It responds to an op-ed by Senators Jabour and McCaffrey (September 1, 2009) which claims that the Senate prostitution bill "closes the loophole" in prostitution law.

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Rep. Peter Martin, District 75, Newport

Senate's 'stand' on prostitution weakens work done in House

State Sens. Paul V. Jabour and Michael J. McCaffrey greatly overstate the Senate's "strong stand" in their guest column of Sept. 1. In reality, the Senate passed a bill that weakens proposed punishments for prostitution offenses. The state House of Representatives passed a bill one month earlier that would make indoor prostitution a crime. This House bill, sponsored by Rep. Joanne M. Giannini, D-Providence, makes a first offense a misdemeanor, with harsher penalties for a subsequent offense. The Senate bill makes only repeat offenses a misdemeanor. The first offense is a citation, payable by a fine — similar to a traffic ticket.

It is gratifying to see that Senate staff members have worked this summer with the attorney general's and State Police's offices on a workable bill. It is important that law enforcement play a major role. What they failed to mention is that Giannini's bill not only closed the "loophole," but was also supported by the State Police, the attorney general,

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the Rhode Island Police Chief's Association, Gov. Donald L. Carcieri and The Providence Journal.

Stating five times that the Senate closed the loophole is inaccurate. The House has been the leader in this area and is responsible for the push to "close the loophole," not the Senate.

The issue would be moot, prostitution would be illegal and law enforcement authorities would be able to act if the Senate had agreed with the heavily endorsed Giannini bill.

Sens. Jabour and McCaffrey now need to truly get serious. Support the House legislation already in place; the sooner, the better for all concerned.

James Meyen, Middletown