

February 22, 2013

Dear Mayor Reed, Public Safety Chair Bond, Council Member Wan, and Council Member Hall,

As residents and business owners of Midtown, we are writing to voice our opposition to the "Banishment Ordinance" that is pending in the Public Safety and Legal Administration Committee and slated to come before the full council soon. This ordinance mandates banishment of individuals convicted of a first offense of prostitution from designated "Areas of Prostitution" and reaffirms existing law to banish them from the entire city of Atlanta after a second offense. It also proposes to increase the mandatory minimum sentence for a first offense from 15 days to 180 days and upholds steep and unreasonable fees for those convicted.

We urge the Atlanta City Council President Ceasar Mitchell and Public Safety and Legal Administration Committee Chair, Councilman Michael J. Bond, NOT to approve this ordinance and to instead focus on real solutions that address the underlying causes behind prostitution such as sexual victimization, substance abuse, mental illness and financial desperation. We simply cannot arrest our way out of this problem or use an uneven approach that doesn't address the demand created by those who seek such services.

Atlanta is known as the city too busy to hate; this ordinance makes us look like the city too busy to make good, sound policy. Research shows that shuffling problems from one part of the city to the next is an ineffective at best, counter productive at worst. Other cities have developed programs which combine curbing demand with the services and programs which allow for sex workers to leave the streets for good and find legitimate employment. The City of Atlanta should be ashamed to have spent 18 months developing a "solution" that does neither of these essential things.

We live and work in Midtown, one of the areas most mentioned in this conversation. The news seems obsessed with a few people's claim that there are condoms and syringes littering our sidewalks. This is simply not true. But if indeed if there is a business location or block where this is a problem, a quick look at other cities reveals that something as simple as adding garbage cans on street corners can greatly reduce these irritations. Sanitation problems can be solved with sanitation solutions. And garbage cans are certainly less expensive than paying more police offers or processing people needlessly through the courts and jail.

We understand that some of our neighbors are getting an outsized amount of attention in this debate. As Midtown residents and business owners, we want to make it clear that they do not speak for the entire neighborhood and, in fact, the vast majority of us would much prefer to see the Council lead with solutions to help these women leave the streets for good. Please do not allow this terrible policy to be enacted in the name of Midtown residents and businesses.

Sincerely,

Anne Pollock, Midtown resident
Maital Dar, Midtown resident
Philip Rafshoon, Midtown resident
Nirmal Trivedi, Midtown resident
Basak Alkan, Midtown resident
Celia Pearce, Midtown resident & business owner
Elizabeth Wilson, Midtown resident
Albert Wan, Midtown business owner
Audrey Whitman, Midtown resident

Stephen Scarborough, Midtown resident
Kely Leiser, Midtown resident
Neetu Abad, Midtown resident
Charmaine Davis, Midtown resident
Joseph Davis, Midtown resident
Dana Wiggins, Midtown resident
Andrea Miller, Midtown resident
Matt Ruzicka, Midtown resident
Amelia White, Midtown resident