

Law Would Increase Punishment for 'Encounters' with Underage Prostitutes

The Oregon State House, concurring to amendments made in the Senate, gave final approval for a bill that would impose strict punishments to people who purchased sexual services from sellers who are under the age of 18.

The crime of paying for sex with a minor would now be punishable with a fine of \$10,000 for a first offense and \$20,000 for a second offense once HB 2417 is signed by the governor. It also separates the crime of paying for sex and the crime of selling sex. Previously, the state had no way to track how many people had been arrested for being "johns" or for being "prostitutes."

"Victims of sex trafficking should be treated like victims, and those who purchase sex with minors should be treated like the

criminals they are," said Rep. Carolyn Tomei. "This bill makes important changes to make sure Oregon law conforms to that

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philosophy."

Oregon state law still treats those minors who sell sex as criminals, despite the rheto-

ric. There are two bills in the legislature that try to address this issue, although they would still retain criminal penalties for the

nize the fact that these children should be treated as victims. The law would help direct these minors to appropriate shelters. If a law enforcement officer wanted to arrest that child and a district attorney wanted to charge that child, this law would do nothing from preventing them from doing that.

Another bill would seek grants to develop specialized housing and rehabilitation facilities for minors who have been arrested for selling sexual services.

HB 2417 would also eliminate the defense for a john that he was unaware of the prostitute's age. It also mandates a 7 day jail stay for second offenses.

minor sellers of sexual services.

One bill, SB 428, would provide education to law enforcement to help them recog-

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