

Testimony of Caroline Germann
Survivor of Sexual Exploitation & Advocate for Women and "at risk" Youth
Kansas House Committee on Federal & State Affairs
HB2054 February 2013

My name is Caroline Germann and I thank you for allowing my testimony in support of of HB 2054 – Community Defense Act as related to sexually oriented businesses.

I was sexually molested when I was five years old and always grew up thinking of the world as sexualized place. I started being promiscuous at a very early age. I just wanted to feel accepted in a world that seemed so much better than not being accepted in a world I felt so alone in. I always felt like no one understood me because of the things I had experienced at such an early age. So I started acting up at home and running away and ended up in 18 different placements through SRS in five years. So I became unattached to my family and had a hard time having positive relationships with people for a short or long period of time. Strip clubs reaffirmed this way of thinking for me.

I lived with a couple of women who were strippers when I was sixteen who were also involved in gang activity. They would put there make up on and dress up and looked so beautiful and would come home at the end of the night with a bunch of money and usually really intoxicated. Then they would sleep all day and do it again. I thought this was a perfect way of life. I stayed at home and watched one of the ladies kids and got intimately involved with one of the male gang members he was very violent towards me. He always encouraged me to hustle and eventually I started having survival sex as a way to get my basic needs met one gang member after another.

I started working in clubs when I was twenty one. I was ashamed to tell my friends and family what I had chosen to do as what I thought would be a lucrative career. At twenty one I was not going to let anyone discourage me from making a living working in the clubs. This was just a way for me to convince myself that I no longer needed my families or friends support. This lead me to being able to forget about all of the moral and values I was taught growing up and instilled new beliefs that this was the way to live. At first I was very nervous but then in the locker room the girls were popping pills and snorting meth and cocaine. It was time to pick my comfort device. Cocaine is what I chose it numbed me and took the edge off and mixed with the alcohol that the men would buy you it was just what I needed to build up the courage to get up on that stage for the first time. The first song you just got undressed to your bra and panties or lingerie whatever you could afford. You could always tell the more experienced girl from the less experienced girls by their outfits, make-up, lingerie, and shoes. The second song you had to completely nude, getting completely nude made me nervous touching the pole after the other girls in fear that I might catch some unsuspecting STD.

Another big letdown of the club is that the women always came to work sick probably because their immune systems were shot because of the party lifestyle and if you missed a night you had to pay a fine. There were fines for everything. There were no healthcare benefits or sick days at the club so you had to try really hard to make more money once you got well. There were always offers to make more money in the club whether they were legal or illegal you just

followed the “don’t ask don’t tell” rule. Whether the offers came from the VIP room, private parties, or just a lonely man wanting some quality time with you after the club had shut down.

Strip clubs were definitely a gateway to become involved, recruited, or coerced into prostitution, and other illegal activity including selling drugs. There was always one girl whose boyfriend would supply his girl with drugs so that she could make him money selling to the other dancers while she was “working. This is how I became involved in escorting and ended up with a serious cocaine addiction.

You always saw the “ballers/dope dealers” come in and spend lots of money and I soon made one of them my boyfriend. This relationship led me to getting a felony possession of marijuana charge and getting shot which led to a spiral downfall of my life into crack cocaine and street prostitution.

After four trips to prison and getting pregnant by my pimp I finally felt like I needed to reach out to my family. I needed some help! I was able to get into a drug treatment facility and then later a transitional living home for women with children who had substance abuse issues. I was finally able to take care of myself and the destruction that this lifestyle had done to my body physically and mentally. Retraining your mind to not think that this was a not so glamorous way to live was hard. Getting up and being on a routine was something I had never really experienced. I am now a home owner and have accomplished a lot. I now have more than I ever had working in the clubs not because I have more money but because I feel good about the decisions I have made and now have emotional support of my family.

I have also been able to be an advocate for women and girls who have experienced working in clubs or in the commercial sex industry and their stories are all a lot like mine. Some of the women are more fortunate or less fortunate and some who have or never will make it out.

I believe there should be restrictions and guidelines in strip clubs. I was a vulnerable girl in a club and the owners and bouncers did nothing to protect me but more or less just offered an environment for my demise. We need laws to regulate an industry that make a lot of money off the willing or not so willing exploitation of women and girls.

Observations from personal experience:

- Women who work in strip clubs will travel to make more money and how that leaves them vulnerable being in new towns that can lead them to be trafficked or coerced into prostitution.
- Money is a motivator to keep women entangled in this lifestyle. The strip club does not offer any benefits, therefore misleading women into thinking that it is a “real” job.
- Strip clubs provide an outlet to glamourize pornography and prostitution.

- The shame associated with working in a strip club leave women isolated from friends and family making the exploitive environment the main social structure for finding acceptance. This creates an environment that allows women to keep secrets and starts the grooming process of breaking down personal boundaries and disregarding morals and values. Once this process has started they start doing things that they never would have agreed to do before.
- Strip clubs often leads to substance abuse issues because clubs will charge clients more to sit down and drink with the girls. Most of the women in the clubs I worked at including myself would have to be high or drunk to continually have to get up on stage and take my clothes off in front of a bunch of strangers.
- VIP rooms allow less supervision of clients with girls so that more sexualization and touching can happen behind a curtain. Girls are taught to hustle a man so if you can do something more and get paid more than you might be considered the “bread winner” of the club. Most pimps also have “bread winners” who are given special privileges or sometimes the opposite they are made to work harder because they generate more revenue.

