



Rt Hon John Swinney MSP
The First Minister of Scotland
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

January 2026

Dear First Minister,

I am writing to express support for the *Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill* ('the Bill'), currently before the Scottish Parliament.

Having engaged closely with the evidence and testimonies that underpin this legislation, and, alongside Bishop Brian McGee, Vice-President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, having met Ash Regan, I believe the Bill represents a vital step toward protecting some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society and addressing the systemic harms associated with prostitution in Scotland.

The Bill's core purpose—to reduce prostitution because of the clear evidence of exploitation, coercion, and harm it causes—is both compelling and necessary.

The Bill introduces a new criminal offence for the purchase of sexual acts, while simultaneously repealing historic offences that have burdened victims rather than perpetrators. Through the quashing of convictions under section 46 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, the Bill recognises the injustice of penalising those who were themselves exploited. This alone would remove a significant barrier that has prevented many from rebuilding their lives.

The Bill adopts a "challenging demand" model that has proven successful in several international jurisdictions. By criminalising buyers rather than sellers, it shifts responsibility onto those who fuel the market for commercial sexual exploitation, and away from those—overwhelmingly women and girls—who have endured abuse, violence, and coercion throughout their involvement in prostitution. This approach aligns with Scotland's broader commitment to addressing violence against women and girls, and it upholds the principle that no individual should be punished for their own exploitation.

Evidence from Scotland and beyond demonstrates that prostitution is deeply rooted in vulnerability. A disproportionate number of those involved have experienced childhood sexual abuse, time in care, grooming, and other forms of trauma. Young people, particularly those in care or in transition out of services, are at acute risk of being targeted by exploiters. The growing role of technology has further expanded opportunities for manipulation and exploitation.



The Bill also responds to urgent concerns around human trafficking. While not all individuals in prostitution are trafficked, trafficking for sexual exploitation is a documented and significant issue in Scotland. International comparisons show a clear connection between demand for prostitution and trafficking, with countries adopting demand-reduction legislation seeing meaningful reductions in exploitation and criminal activity. Ms Regan's arguments around human trafficking resonated with Bishop McGee and his experience of tackling human trafficking through his work with the Santa Marta Group; an alliance of police chiefs and bishops from around the world working together with civil society to eradicate human trafficking and modern-day slavery. Bishop McGee strongly believes the Bill reflects the realities identified by trafficked people, law enforcement, and Church agencies around the world.

Crucially, the Bill embeds a statutory right to support for anyone who is, or has been, involved in prostitution. This includes access to accommodation, financial assistance, healthcare, and counselling—support that is essential for recovery and for enabling individuals to exit prostitution safely and sustainably.

I recognise that political views on the Bill vary, and expect Parliament to provide considerable scrutiny from which the Bill can benefit, but I believe Scotland has an important opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the protection of vulnerable women and girls, the prevention of trafficking, and the promotion of equality. I urge you and your Government to support the Bill as it proceeds through Parliament.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to safeguarding the wellbeing and dignity of all people in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

John Keenan

Bishop John Keenan,
President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland