Simon: Strip clubs should fund rape crisis centers

Written by Kathryn Phillips Tuesday, 21 February 2012 09:43

Lt. Governor to work with lawmakers to fund violence prevention

CHICAGO – February 17, 2012. An advocate for sexual and domestic violence survivors, Lt. Governor Sheila Simon today pledged to work with State Sen. Toi Hutchinson and the General Assembly to pass legislation that would fund rape crisis centers through an entrance fee on strip clubs that permit alcohol.

Simon said adult entertainment facilities that profit from the combination of nude dancing and alcohol should help pick up the tab for related social ills, such as rape, sexual assault, prostitution and other crimes. She likened the surcharge to using a gasoline tax to pay for road construction or gambling fees to pay for addiction services.

"As a former domestic battery prosecutor, I see a connection between the alcohol-fueled exploitation of women and violence against women," Simon said. "It is only fair to require the people who profit from the adult entertainment industry to finance those who provide advocacy and counseling services to the victims of sexual assault."

Simon, who founded the domestic violence legal clinic at the Southern Illinois University School of Law, announced her support for Senate Bill 3348 on Friday alongside the bill's sponsor, State Sen. Hutchinson, advocates from the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, and survivors of the commercial sex trade.

"Illinois' budget woes have forced cuts to many social service organizations, including many that serve victims of rape and sexual assault, limiting the ability of sexually abused women to receive the treatment they need," Hutchinson said. "The legislation I have introduced is still in its infancy and is by no means a final plan for how we can deal with this issue. I am looking forward to sitting down with the adult entertainment industry to discuss ways they can be a part of the solution to this problem."

As introduced, the legislation would require strip club owners who serve or allow alcohol to be consumed on their premises to pay a \$5-per-patron fee. The money would be funneled to the new Sexual Assault Prevention Fund, and the state would fund grants to community-based

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organizations that work to reduce sexual assault or aid crime victims. Similar legislation was upheld by the Texas Supreme Court last year.

The Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault asked Simon and Hutchinson to support the Illinois legislation as it deals with the state's budget constraints. The coalition's funding decreased \$1.2 million the past three budget years, and one Chicago crisis center closed Dec. 31 due to funding struggles.

The strip club surcharge is a proactive, budget-neutral way to restore funding for critical violence prevention and rehabilitation services for women, Simon said.

"Strip clubs contribute to the objectification and sexual exploitation of women. Rape crisis centers respond to women exploited by sexual harassment, abuse, rape and trafficking. Our doors are open 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year. SB3348 is not the end of strip clubs, but a new beginning for helping victims recover from the trauma of sexual violence," said Polly Poskin, executive director of the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, a not-for-profit corporation of 33 community-based sexual assault crisis centers and 26 satellite offices across Illinois.

Illinois is home to more than 100 strip clubs, and many serve or permit alcohol on their premises. Women who dance in strip clubs report a wide range of verbal, physical and sexual abuse at the workplace. Research also links strip clubs to trafficking, prostitution, and an increase in male sexual violence against both the women who work in the clubs and those who live and work in the surrounding areas.

"Strip clubs can increase the demand for other sexual services in a community. When more men are seeking to buy sex, pimps report to researchers that they meet the demand by bringing prostituted women and girls to the area," said Lynne Johnson, director of policy and advocacy for the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, a non-profit that addresses the culture, institutions, and individuals that perpetrate, profit from, or support sexual exploitation.

Simon and Hutchinson said the next step is to work with Senate leaders to pass the regulatory legislation.

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