

City Council Hearing | Removing Responsibilities from the NYPD

Good afternoon, My name is Jennifer Orellana, I am a Puerto Rican trans woman and community leader in different groups, and today I am participating as leader of the Make the Road New York, the Trans Immigrant project.

In the 90's I managed to complete my nursing degree, and began my career as a nurse in local hospitals. However, due to the discrimination based on my sexual orientation and my gender identity, I had to leave nursing and immigrate to New York to start doing service sex, one of the oldest professions in the world. Being a sex worker gave me the freedom to be my own boss, and to have financial stability not only for myself but also for my family members.

However, the most difficult thing about my profession as a sex worker and what causes me the most uneasiness and fear is the constant police harassment and the fear of being arrested. My last arrest was in 2018 when I was with a man – who ended up being an undercover cop. We had not yet entered the room or started to do anything, when 8 policemen violently smashed the front door of my apartment and arrested me in a harsher way than I could've ever expected - even much worse than what we see on the TV. This arrest was very humiliating. The police scandal was so great that even my neighbors found out, and this led to housing problems. The landlord tried to kick me out of my apartment for being a sex worker, and I had to fight for more than eight months in court not to be evicted.

I have no doubt that the squad that broke the door, messed up my apartment, and created a scandal in my building was a vice unit. My story is not unique and many trans women can testify to the violent and abusive way in which the NYPD, especially the vice units, behave. This constant police surveillance creates insecurity for us as sex workers, reproduces false stereotypes about our work, puts us at risk from other civilians around us by publicly identifying us as sex servants, and ultimately puts us at risk of losing our homes.

That is why I am here because I demand that we dismantle the vice units so that people who have survived sex trafficking, people who are sex workers, and people who are perceived as sex workers are not victims of the violence and police abuse of the vice unit.

Thank you.