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Dozens of tickets issued to clients of sex workers

Bar Peleg

The police have issued dozens of tickets for the consumption of sexual services in recent weeks, enforcing a law that went into effect at the start of the year. In the first six months after the law went into effect, only 12 tickets were issued. Most of the tickets, each of which carries a fine of 2,000 shekels (\$624), were issued in Haifa and in south Tel Aviv.

According to police records, more than 50 tickets were issued in the rest of the country in the past three months.

A source who spoke with Haaretz on the condition of anonymity said that over the past few weeks about 30 additional tickets were issued in south Tel Aviv, mostly in the Neve Sha'ananim neighborhood surrounding the city's central bus station. The enforcement operation followed protests by residents against prostitution in the area.

In Haifa, police officers issued 10 fines after raiding a brothel in the city in early September. Seven tickets were issued in the city in August.

Police officials told Haaretz that the increase in ticketing reflects a shift to stricter enforcement of the law, police officials. An official in the Tel Aviv Dis-

trict said the "law is new is for everyone, but we are on board and carrying out enforcement. The customers are already telling one another about our actions, and this requires more sophistication from us."

At a meeting of the implementation team for the law held in May, the representative of the police said that because there is still no alternative means for enforcement, and in light of the numerous missions placed on the police because of the coronavirus outbreak the police cannot prepare to enforce the law in an effective manner, but will make an effort.

Nonetheless, the representative promised that great effort would be invested in enforcing the law when it went into effect. She also said that difficulties were to be expected using only tickets to enforce the law, and it is possible the enforcement would become effective only once consumers of prostitution would be detained by police and questioned about the circumstances of being at the scene.

Along with the rise in police activity, women working in prostitution and survivors of sex work report increased distress because the solutions the law offers in welfare services do not match their needs in practice. Among the solutions

the law offers are: housing assistance, unemployment compensation for those in vocational training programs or seeking work, subsistence allowances for older women who cannot find work and fighting violence against sex workers.

"While the customer is fined thousands of shekels, the police are taking from women sums of thousands and tens of thousands of shekels intended for paying rent and living expenses," said the Ahoti and Argaman women's organizations. "The part of 'coordination with welfare authorities in rehabilitation and treatment' is a vicious joke. They don't need police officers to fine customers, they need housing and respectable living solutions."

"From the impressions we have receives, it seems the police have treated the women appropriately, the director of the Task Force on Human Trafficking and Prostitution, Or Abu, told Haaretz. "Though we always have a fear that women will be harmed along the way during enforcement operations, the purpose of the law is help them. We expect from the police to present proper work plans and also go to other places where there is prostitution, and they have not gone, such as Eilat and Jerusalem," said Abu.