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Anchorage- Alaskan sex workers are breathing a sigh of relief in the wake of yesterday's guilty verdict of Brian Steven Smith in an Anchorage court room on all 14 charges, including two counts of first-degree murder in the deaths of Kathleen Jo Henry and Veronica Abouchuk. He was also convicted of multiple counts of sexual assault and special circumstance of torture. We hope he will serve a life sentence.

"A key witness in the case came forward with evidence that initiated an investigation into the murder of Kathleen Jo Henry. She was hesitant to come forward with a cell phone obtained from Smith and instead contacted police with the evidence from the phone that she had transferred onto an SD card and unfortunately lost the phone shortly after. If she had known she had immunity, law enforcement could have had access to the phone and additional evidence," said Amber Nickerson, a member of Community United for Safety and Protection, who sat through the lengthy double-murder trial.

The immunity in reporting provision for people in Alaska's sex trade was passed as a part of the much fought over crime omnibus bill

known as SB91 in 2016. The immunity provision said that victims or witnesses to serious crimes can't be charged with prostitution as a result of reporting those crimes to police.

"The sex worker who came forward with the videos, not knowing that she had immunity from charges, was so brave," said Terra Burn also of Community United for Safety, a group of Alaska's current and former sex workers, sex trafficking victims and allies. "She definitely prevented the murders of more sex workers and we are all so grateful to her. If more sex workers knew they had access to this immunity from prosecution on prostitution charges when making these kinds of reports, maybe more victims and/or witnesses would be able to come forward and make Alaska safer."

"It is imperative that all Alaskans understand there is immunity, and that victims and witnesses with knowledge about crimes committed by Smith or perpetrators like Smith, feel safe contacting the police. After hearing and seeing the evidence, there are still many unanswered questions," said Amber Nickerson. ###