

# Massage Therapy and Human Trafficking: A Toolkit

Understanding Massage Therapy, Sexually Oriented Businesses (SOBs) and Human Trafficking to create more awareness, change the narrative, create better licensing laws and media campaigns through local networks that work with local community teams to end SOBs disguised as massage businesses and end human trafficking.

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## The Problem: Overview

Our neighborhoods are filled with Sexually Oriented Businesses (SOBs) disguised as massage businesses. For over 128 years and longer, the massage therapy profession has been entangled with these SOBs and has been struggling to separate itself from these businesses. The massage profession has a long history of attempting to end the confusion. We have tried creating associations and added more licensing and legislation and tried to create a National Certification.

The latest trend is that many states are moving to require something called establishment licenses that are supposed to make it easier to investigate and prosecute the SOB's/Human Traffickers, allowing authorities to enter massage businesses for inspections yet there has been no evidence or research on these licenses that show that it is doing the job of untangling massage from the SOB's. **The main problem with these laws is it makes it so massage therapists who have gone through massage school and the massage licensing process have to once again prove that they are law-abiding massage therapists. This has to stop.**

One of the most devastating things that has happened to the profession is that the media, legislators and many others now refer to these brothels as "illicit massage businesses" or "massage parlors" when in fact they have nothing to do with MASSAGE or MASSAGE THERAPY. In 2017, the Polaris Project created a report "Human Trafficking in Illicit Massage Businesses Report" (See the full report on archive.org: <https://web.archive.org/web/20180118005525/https://polarisproject.org/massage-parlor-trafficking-report>) and coined the words "illicit massage business" making it so the massage profession bears the brunt of these brothels disguised as massage businesses in every community. The Federation of Massage State Boards also has a task force working on the issue and in 2017 they also wrote a report. They actually were aware that there was an issue with this term back in 2017, yet continued to use it.

"3 This report uses the term Illicit Businesses to describe establishments that use massage and bodywork as a front for their illegal activity. Polaris uses the term Illicit Massage Business to denote businesses using massage and bodywork as a front for human trafficking. We have inferred that use of the term 'illicit' alongside 'massage businesses' is not intended to delegitimize law-abiding massage businesses or associate them in any way with schemes that are engaged in human trafficking. Illicit Massage Business is a commonly used anti-trafficking term which is defined as an enterprise that purports to offer massage services but instead offers commercial sex. <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/resources/human-trafficking-and-illicit-massage-businesses-report>"

Massage therapists everywhere have been forced to adapt and change how we work because of the continued misuse of language that further confuses massage with sex work. Everyday massage therapists around the world are sexually harassed when asked for 'happy endings' and have to deal with the creeps that do things like making jokes that may seem innocent, demanding sex, leaving their 'mark' on massage tables, sexually assaulting massage therapists and sending their sexually explicit photos, This makes the massage therapy profession a high risk industry. Laws have been made that say we can't touch private parts or work past certain hours into the night. We take classes in self-defense and how to deal with offending clients. We are taught the many red flags that might indicate that a person is looking for sex so we can effectively screen clients. The extra steps needed to ensure safety also increases the cost of doing business. We really should not have to be doing this.

Massage therapists in the US, attend approved massage schools, pass exams and pass background checks. We are often required by law to post their license on the office wall and include the number in advertisements. Here are the laws in some states: <https://www.lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com/massage-licensing-laws-display-of-advertising/>

Massage therapists work to reduce stress and relieve pain. We work with various health conditions such as anxiety/depression, muscle pain and dysfunction, headaches, fibromyalgia, strains/sprains and many other conditions. We help people going through cancer treatments and joint replacement surgeries. Massage therapy is covered by insurance when there is a need for it due to a car accident or injury at work. We are considered to be healthcare providers in many states and many health insurance companies are paying for massage therapy for medically necessary situations.

We have specific language in laws that say that only licensed massage therapists can use the specific terms massage and massage therapy, yet our law enforcement agencies are not investigating and prosecuting based on these laws. There seems to be some disconnect between the laws and law enforcement which might be due to the complexity of the problem.

## The Language We Use

### Illicit Massage Business

I already mentioned, the Polaris ([www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)) coined the term “Illicit Massage Business”. The problem is that these are NOT “massage anything”. This is very damaging to the massage profession. The public often thinks that the many news stories calling out Illicit Massage Businesses are just massage therapists doing bad things. These places need to be called what they are: Sexually Oriented Businesses (SOBs) Disguised as Massage, Brothels Disguised as Massage Businesses (BDAMB), Illicit Sex Businesses and Human Trafficking Rings (ISBHTR).

### Massage Parlor

Lately more news and media sources have been using the words “Massage Parlor” to indicate that it is a business providing sexual services under the guise of massage. Many state laws still have the words Massage Parlor included. The words Massage Parlor need to be eliminated from the media, legislation and everywhere. Everyone needs to start calling it what it is— Brothels disguised as massage businesses. What will the local communities think once they hear that?

The words **Massage Parlor** has already been removed from the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes so let's make sure it is not used anymore.

*“North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is a system for classifying establishments (individual business locations) by type of economic activity in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Its purposes are: (1) to facilitate the collection, tabulation, presentation, and analysis of data relating to establishments, and (2) to promote uniformity and comparability in the presentation and analysis of statistical data describing the North American economy. NAICS is used by Federal statistical agencies that collect or publish data by industry. It is also widely used by State and local agencies, trade associations, private businesses, and other organizations.”*

Businesses that provide massage therapy services are under NAICS 621399, Offices of All Other Miscellaneous Health Practitioners. Massage Parlor was previously under NAICS 81299 and has been removed from the codes. The [NY State Society of Medical Massage Therapists](#) and AMTA were instrumental in creating this change.

### **Masseuse/Masseur**

Historically, the words Masseuse and Masseur have been used to denote that massage is being done. While these terms were historically correct, they are no longer appropriate as many are also using these words in the sexually oriented businesses. While not as much of a problem as the illicit massage business words, it will be helpful to remove these from state laws and the media and start calling all people who are licensed to give massage in their state/city what they are--- Massage Therapists.

### **Asian Massage**

Asian Massage is probably the most obvious disguise that is used by these businesses. The public and others are not aware of the differences. There are very legitimate forms of Asian Massage and the massage therapists that are trained in types of massage from Asia use their exact names like (taken from the [American Organization for Bodywork Therapies of Asia](#)):

- Acupressure
- Jin Shin Do® Bodymind Acupressure®
- Amma
- Amma Therapy®
- Chi Nei Tsang
- Jin Shou Tuina™
- Nuad Bo 'Rarn (Traditional Thai)
- Tuina
- Medical Qigong
- Five Element Shiatsu
- Integrative Eclectic Shiatsu
- Japanese Shiatsu
- Macrobiotic Shiatsu
- Shiatsu Anma Therapy
- Zen Shiatsu
- Shiatsu

## **The Laws We Make**

### **Massage Establishment Licensing.**

Many states have moved to creating massage establishment licensing laws that require massage therapists who open a business to have a specific establishment license. This makes it so massage therapists are now more involved in stopping a problem created by the Sexually Oriented Businesses. AMTA and ABMP have said that they do not approve of it, yet many states are moving forward with it based on the idea that they think it will help end the problem. See [their response to the reports](#) created by the FSTMB back in 2017/2018. ABMP and AMTA are not in favor of the FSTMB being involved in human trafficking, yet they do

not help with changing the narrative that we are left with. The many ordinances that are being created make it the massage professions problem when it should not be our problem. Establishment licensing implies that the massage profession is responsible for this problem and makes it so we must solve it. The issues around prostitution and sex trafficking are social issues which must be addressed in each state and in each community.

Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Vermont have what are called Establishment Licensing laws. The language in these vary greatly and there has been no research done on whether or not this is helping or if it is the best way to disrupt these businesses from using the name of massage to disguise prostitution and human trafficking. If you take a look at the language in these laws, you will probably think who are they regulating – massage therapists or sex workers?

This needs to be researched if it is to be continued or added to massage licensing laws. The Federation of Massage State Boards apparently does have a human trafficking task force so we might want to start there. Their [report from 2017](#) actually even calls for research on whether or not establishment licensing is working or the correct answer.

### **Human Trafficking**

The other part of this is that it is often said that human trafficking is involved in these SOB operations making it even more complicated. There have been a few reports on massage and human trafficking that have been created back in 2018 that are inconclusive on how much human trafficking is actually involved in these operations. More research is needed in this area to help create a plan of action.

## **History of Massage Therapy Entangled With Prostitution**

The very long history of the massage therapy profession is filled with examples of the many things we have tried to do to enhance the image of the massage profession and untangle it from sexually oriented businesses.

From 1894 when the British Medical Association (BMA) inquired into the education and practice of massage practitioners in London, and found that prostitution was commonly associated with unskilled workers and debt, often working with forged qualifications. In response, legitimate massage workers formed the Society of Trained Masseuses (now known as the [Chartered Society of Physiotherapy](#)), with an emphasis on high academic standards and a medical model for massage training. Members of the Society were required to pass examinations and were subject to routine surveillance.

[The Historical Roots of Human Trafficking](#) book (pp. 65-66). Springer International Publishing) sites “Government-controlled “comfort stations” were instated as early as 1904 during the Russo-Japanese War (A “comfort station” was a euphemism for a military brothel, where young women and girls were forced or coerced into prostitution.”

In 1979, the New York Times had an article “[Therapy Association Combats Current ‘Massage’ Connotation](#)” where the president of AMTA was quoted as saying that “The so-called “massage parlor,”

they said, is usually a front for prostitution *or* other illicit sexual activity. Practitioners now want to limit the field to graduates of recognized schools who have passed certification examinations.

Pierrette M. Plouffe, a spokesman for the American Massage and Therapy Association and herself a massage therapist in Woonsocket, R.I.’ said: “That’s the only way to combat having just anyone do ‘massage.’ She pronounced the last word with audible quotation marks.

Fifteen states have regulatory laws of the kind favored by the association, and such legislation is pending in six more, including Massachusetts, Mrs. Plouffe said. But even in states where, like New York, masseurs and masseuses are strictly licensed, the confusion with “massage parlors” persists.

In 1987, AMTA made the [New York Times](#) news saying “WHAT’S NEW IN MASSAGE: DON’T say masseuse”.

In 1992, AMTA created the National Certification Board of Massage Therapy but it was first intended to be an entry exam into the association. (Looking back, I wonder how it would be today if they had done this to begin with.) Associations should be in charge of professional development and one way to do that is with exams.) The NCBTMB created an exam and called it a National Certification Exam, when in fact it was not exactly a national credential. States still had their own laws regarding the number of hours of education and the hours required in specific areas and MT’s needed to fulfill those specific hours. National Certification was replaced by the Massage & Bodywork Licensing Exam (MBLEx from the Federation of Massage State Boards) and we now have Board Certification in Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (BCTMB®) .

States added massage licensing requirements and created laws around giving massage through the many years, yet the problem persists and grows larger. Recent counts show a large increase of these places since 2019.

Number of Sexually Oriented Businesses by State

	2019	2023
Alabama	47	219
Alaska	22	64
Arizona	229	716
Arkansas	10	133
California	2482	9019
Colorado	180	655
Connecticut	109	306
Delaware	63	143
Florida	852	1940
Georgia	183	572
Hawaii	86	256
Idaho	45	93
Illinois	342	1134
Indiana	100	362
Iowa	67	228
Kansas	75	236
Kentucky	48	177
Louisiana	120	334
Maine	10	37
Maryland	86	320
Massachusetts	243	778
Michigan	119	361
Minnesota	59	388
Mississippi	7	49
Missouri	90	237
Montana	23	40
Nebraska	19	79

	2019	2023
Nevada	157	434
New Hampshire	14	66
New Jersey	443	1085
New Mexico	133	345
New York	827	3160
North Carolina	80	321
North Dakota	9	42
Ohio	92	396
Oklahoma	134	424
Oregon	83	318
Pennsylvania	387	978
Rhode Island	20	64
South Carolina	102	268
South Dakota	2	29
Tennessee	36	227
Texas	1036	2880
Utah	84	317
Vermont	12	36
Virginia	289	753
Washington	279	1080
West Virginia	7	33
Wisconsin	89	297
Wyoming	16	47

Numbers from 2019 taken from this chart on <https://traffickinginstitute.org/illicit-massage-businesses-the-pervasive-insidious-form-of-trafficking-happening-across-the-united-states/>

Numbers from 2023 were taken from rubmaps (one of the awful sites---don’t go there).

The numbers do have some issues as it is not comparing the same counts but it is a place to start. The exact numbers are not available. The numbers could also be worse without establishment licensing, but we really don’t know. It is clear that the problem is growing despite our efforts to curb these

places with licensing and legislation. We do have loopholes in our licensing laws and the laws are inconsistent across the US.

In 2017, the Federation of Massage State Boards created a Human Trafficking Task force and provided a report. <https://www.fsmtb.org/media/1606/http-report-final-web.pdf> There has been no follow up on this although recently they also put out a report regarding the many fake massage schools handing out fake diplomas and such and provided info on how to track and shut these places down. [A Toolkit for Identifying Human Trafficking and Fraud in Higher Education](#)

The most current statements we have from our leading massage associations is from back in 2017/2018.

Whenever the topic of brothel's disguised as massage businesses (aka illicit massage businesses/IMB's) comes up, it is said that they are usually connected to issues of Human Trafficking.

In 2017, The Federation of Massage State Boards also created a report on [human trafficking in the massage profession](#). (PDF) It says that "the impact of the problem on the massage profession is serious and extensive":

- It endangers therapists. In addition to all of the dangers inherent in human trafficking, the association of massage therapy with prostitution or "happy endings" subjects therapists to assault, threats, harassment, and more subtle forms of intimidation;
- The cost of doing business rises due to increased exposure to safety risks and security hazards; Compromised reputations: Regulatory board responses may be viewed as inadequate or ineffective due to public perceptions of the nature and scope of the problem; Smaller massage establishments may suffer disproportionately. Larger massage franchise brands may be perceived as less likely to be involved in illicit activity; The presumption of illicit activity is prevalent and negatively affects bona fide professionals, schools and establishments;
- It encourages racial and ethnic profiling, as well as discrimination against certain groups; A substantial amount of fraud directed at massage therapy educational institutions, testing authorities, and state licensing boards is a problem that casts uncertainty on their ability to limit entry to qualified candidates;
- The necessity (and burden) of additional regulation and safety protections, such as: Increased application fees funding interventions to detect and prevent fraud and to support investigations and prosecutions of human trafficking; The high cost of ensuring that adequate security measures are in place for examinations to prevent cheating and item harvesting and to support legal action;  
Multiple and overlapping regulatory requirements (local and state, professional and establishment);
- Establishment licensing requirements."



## **The Massage Profession Responds to the Federation of Massage State Boards Report**

The following are our (ABMP and AMTA's) basic objections to the report and its recommendations (from this [post on the ABMP website](#)):

- The opening sentence and paragraph of the Executive Summary imply that the massage therapy profession is infested with human trafficking, rather than reporting that human traffickers and prostitutes use the word 'massage' to bypass unenforced laws to conduct their illegal activities. Prostitutes and human traffickers are outside the massage therapy profession, not a part of it. They are using the good name of massage therapy to give a false appearance to their illegal activities. The implication of the report is that massage and the massage therapy profession are the problems, not human traffickers and prostitutes co-opting our profession.
- Human trafficking and prostitution are very different activities. This report does not adequately differentiate between them or how they each use the name of massage to hide their behavior.
- The report is filled with information that ignores FBI and Homeland Security data and lacks credible citations.
- In January 2013, the national UCR Program began collecting offense and arrest data regarding human trafficking as authorized by the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008. The act requires the FBI to collect human trafficking offense data and to make distinctions between prostitution, assisting or promoting prostitution, and purchasing prostitution. The FSMTB report surprisingly does not address this data.
- Human trafficking is an issue to be primarily addressed by law enforcement. The FBI has stated: "Human trafficking, believed to be the third-largest criminal activity in the world, is a form of human slavery which must be addressed at the interagency level. The FBI works human trafficking cases under both its Civil Rights program and its Violent Crimes Against Children program. The majority of human trafficking victims in our cases are U.S. citizens, and we take a victim- centered approach in investigating such cases, which means that ensuring the needs of the victims take precedence over all other considerations."

## **The Polaris Project: Human Trafficking in the Massage Profession**

In 2017, the Polaris Project created a report on the issues of Human Trafficking in the Massage Profession. It was posted on their website for a long time, but has now been taken off but you can still read it on archive.org.

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20180118005525/https://polarisproject.org/massage-parlor-trafficking-report>)

In the executive summary they found that there were more than 9,000 of what they are calling illicit massage businesses open in the US with a total annual revenue of \$2.5 Billion a year. The women recruited into these businesses that Polaris refers to as "massage parlors" (which are mostly brothel's disguised as massage parlors) have recently arrived from China or South Korea and have debts and

extreme financial pressures and are also mothers who are trying to care for their child/children. Most do not speak English meaning it complicates matters even more. They are threatened with deportation and crimes against their families.

The Polaris Project has created [Model Legislation Resources](#) which really is damaging to the massage profession in that it keeps us tangled up with the many sex workers using massage as a front for their business. They coined the term “Illicit Massage Business” which implies that these are indeed massage therapists and not sexually oriented businesses disguised as massage. This makes massage therapists and the massage profession part of the problem which we are not (except for the very few bad massage therapists who do sexually assault their clients.)

### **Whose fight is it?**

The fight against human trafficking is not the massage professions problem as ABMP and AMTA have said. What we do need to do is make sure that the many state and local task forces on human trafficking are informed of our work, licensing procedures, background checks and other things to help untangle massage from prostitution/human trafficking. What we need to do is work on these things:

1. Human trafficking and prostitution are two different things yet there is no data on the number of these businesses that are involved in human trafficking or just prostitution. We need to make sure the authorities get that data to help us be more informed.
2. We need to be working with the authorities like Homeland Security, FBI and State/Local task forces on human trafficking to be informed of their work and to work on untangling massage from these crimes to preserve our name. The authorities need very special training to be able to differentiate law-abiding massage therapists from the SOBs.
3. Law enforcement is not doing their job of investigating and prosecuting those who are unlicensed and going under the guise of massage. There seems to be some disconnect in this process that needs to be corrected. Many state laws make it a civil issue and many also have laws that state that it is a misdemeanor of some level. See [Penalties for Unlicensed Massage](#).
4. Ordinances are being made in cities/towns/counties that make us once again the bad guys requiring inspections, putting sanctions on working hours and other factors that limit massage businesses. Reading some of the ordinances make it sound like it is massage therapists that are the prostitutes and they are NOT.
5. [Establishment licensing](#) is being implemented which also limits massage businesses and makes massage therapist out to be the bad guys. These licenses have not been researched to find out if they are working or not.

### **Our Professional Associations**

Most recently, our professional associations have been called out for lack of action on this and even perpetuating the problem. A recent article “Perpetuating Victimization with Efforts to Reduce Human

Trafficking: a Call to Action for Massage Therapist Protection” says:

(<https://ijtmb.org/index.php/ijtmb/article/view/775/909>)

“It is time for professional massage therapy organizations, regulating bodies, and corporations to directly protect massage therapists and indirectly protect human trafficking victims instead of making massage therapists responsible for their victimization. Creating a centralized and dedicated process for SH reporting, with support staff trained to debrief those reporting predatory behavior, would protect massage therapists that financially invest in those professional massage organizations as required consumers. A key component in protecting massage therapists is a unified position against SH that unequivocally condemns professional massage sexualization by expecting adults to know the legality of asking anyone for sex as a transaction. That position requires organizations to commit in word and action toward the support and benefit of the workforce that assures their existence and pays their salaries.”

There is a coalition of massage associations that include these 7 organizations: ABMP, AMTA, NCBTMB, FSTMB, AFMTE, COMTA, MTF that meet once or twice a year to share information about what they are working on. These organizations need to lead the way on this as it is very complex and requires working together.

## **Protecting Yourself: Zero Tolerance**

As a massage therapist, it is important to learn everything you can about possible ways clients can and will challenge your boundaries especially around sex. The massage profession is so entangled with sex work, it makes our role as a therapeutic massage therapist to separate our work from that of sexually oriented businesses.

### **Setting Up Your Business**

Every aspect of your business will be about creating a safe place for clients and protecting yourself from having to deal with everything from simple jokes about “happy endings” and being a massage therapist to sexual assault in the massage room.

**Business Name:** Your business name and website domain will tell people more about you than you think. Unfortunately, you have to think like a sex hobbyist when creating a business name for yourself.

**Policies and Procedures:** Creating policies of informed consent can go a long way to ensure people know what you do and what will happen in a session. Policies on draping, behavior and informing them on what massage does sets the stage for you being able to enforce policies and know when to report to law enforcement.

**Website and social media presence:** Having a content rich website that shows that YOU are the EXPERT On massage therapy can help show that massage is therapy. Search engines focus on sites that are the authority on subjects. Here is how to do it from [www.massagepracticebuilder.com](http://www.massagepracticebuilder.com)

For employers: When you employ massage therapists, you have the added responsibility of keeping your employees safe from harm and also running the business. You will need very clear policies for everything and especially on how to handle possible scenarios of sexual solicitation. Dealing with these issues immediately shows your support for employees and your business.

### **Establishing, Communicating and Enforcing Boundaries**

While your policies, procedures, website, social media presence is the beginning of setting boundaries, when the time comes it is often very challenging to handle difficult discussions. When your boundaries are clearly stated and the consequences of what happens when boundaries are crossed, puts the ball in the client's court as to whether or not they want to continue seeing you as a client. Firing clients will be the last resort and will be very uncommon.

### **Screening clients**

Online scheduling software can help screen clients by adding a simple or complete intake form asking questions about their health and needs.

If you are in very vulnerable locations such as a mobile massage therapist or work in a home office where there is more risk, screening clients by taking phone calls to set up appointments can help.

Knowing the signs of potential troublesome clients can help and planning your response to questionable emails/texts can help to differentiate yourself from sexually oriented businesses. Many people are still uniformed of correct terminology and do not know that asking for a full body massage or calling you a masseuse is no longer acceptable and is often code language for hobbyists (people seeking sexual services).

Screening people who contact you can help reduce the number of clients who try to solicit you for sexual services. You do not have to book every person who contacts you. It is unfortunate that we actually have to do this, but the continued misconception and entanglement of massage and sexually oriented businesses creates a risky situation for massage therapists. While screening can help, in no way does it guarantee that a person is safe to take as a client. Other things must also be put into place in the office or work environment to create a safe environment.

### **It's Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature in the workplace or learning environment, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ([EEOC](#)).

[Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) (Title VII) prohibits sexual harassment by **customers, clients, and any third parties**—the same as it prohibits sexual harassment between employees, regardless of whether or not they are just employees, managers or supervisors. Third-party harassment is illegal.

Some signs of sexual harassment from customers/clients are:

- Unwanted sexually explicit photos, emails, or text messages

- Requests for undraped massage
- Verbal harassment of a sexual nature, including jokes referring to sexual acts or sexual orientation.
- Discussing sexual relations/stories/fantasies at work, school, or in other inappropriate places.
- Asking for sexual services either directly or indirectly

### **Red Flag and Yellow Flags**

Red and Yellow Flags are the warning signs that someone may be looking for other services like “happy endings” which really is a case of sexual harassment. Red Flags mean DO NOT SCHEDULE. Yellow is a possible warning sign but not always concreted. You have to decide what is a Red and what is a Yellow for YOU.

#### **Red Flags**

- Asking clearly if you give happy endings before or during a session.
- Asking to send a photo of you to them or they send a lewd photo to you.
- When they ask about draping and alternative draping saying things like they are European and they don’t drape there or saying that they often run warm and draping makes them too hot. Draping is required by law in most states.
- Requests for Prostate massage saying their doctor recommended it...then tell them to have the doctor give it.

#### **Yellow Flags**

- Wanting a last minute appointment. This is often cited as a red-flag, but it is a big assumption that people wanting a massage at the last minute/same day is a request for sexual services. Many massage therapists take same day appointments without any issues.
- Asking for **full-body massage**. This is often cited as a red-flag but it is also an innocent request made by people who don’t know that this is seen as a red-flag..
- Asking for specific groin work. This is often code for something else but it can also be a legitimate request for legitimate work on specific muscles.
- Don’t want to fill out intake form. I have had some legit clients not want to do this when not fully understanding the reasons for it.
- Asks for late night appointments or out of hours appointment times.

## Online Booking Systems

Having online booking systems can deter people as they have to put in their personal contact information in order to use systems. Your booking system should be linked from your website that also is one of the ways that they understand that you are not one of those places. A great website will show that YOU are the EXPERT at what you do – massage therapy. Adding intake forms to the appointment making system can also be a deterrent. As an additional screening step, you can require that people pay for their session as they book the appointment, making them add their credit card into your booking system.

These can be helpful even if you have a home office or mobile massage business that opens you to higher risk.

## Screening Without Online Booking

If you don't have an online booking system, you can respond to people with telling them you will call them to set up an appointment. Requesting this information will usually stop the interactions as they will not want to give you this. If they insist on continuing, you can send them your statement of informed consent that will tell about the work you do. You can include a statement of zero tolerance for sexual behavior and point them to a page on this [website for your state](#) that explains just what a massage therapist does in your state.

If they do continue and you do actually get a phone call with them, you can then start asking questions like:

- How did you find me?
- What type of massage therapy are you seeking?
- Ask about their health conditions.
- Have you had massage therapy before and what type did you have?

If you have gotten this far without any redflags, you might be good to go, but as always proceed with caution.

## The Big “E”

We all learned about this in massage school, but when it actually happens on the table in a room where the lights are low, the soft music is playing and most people behave properly, it can come as a surprise and catch us off guard. We all know they are a normal part of being touched and can happen innocently or purposefully. The thing is knowing what to say, when to say it and how to share what the boundary is and what to do when you have a true pervert on the table.

Let the client decide how they want to address the issue. Most will just not do anything about it and ignore it. Those who are there for their happy ending will act and do additional things to try to get your attention. Additional action needs to be addressed the moment it starts. Stop the session and be

direct. Tell them their actions are not appropriate and will need to stop or the session will need to stop. Ask them if they want to continue the session. Let them decide what to do.

### **When to Fire Massage Clients.**

Yes, fire a client right then and there if you feel unsafe for any reason, but firing clients really is the last resort when you have set the boundaries and clearly communicated them to the person and stated the consequences. “I just want to let you know that this behavior is unacceptable and if you do it again, your session will be terminated and you will not be able to come back.” Setting the boundary and the consequence will let clients decide if they want to continue or not.

The boundary setting needs to begin at the first sign of transgression. This is often very difficult to do especially when talking about sexually oriented topics. Often massage therapists let it go on for too long and go into the freeze response. It is important to practice the scenario and get your actions set in your mind. Even then it may be challenging when the situation happens. Just get the support that you need by talking to a peer supervisor, peer group, counselor or other support.

It is unfortunate, yet a reality that we have to always be prepared to call law enforcement or deal with physical/sexual assault in the massage office.

### **When/how to report to law enforcement.**

When you start your massage business, start a relationship with law enforcement. Find your local police/sheriff and attend their community events like neighborhood watches, coffee with cops or other events they may be offering. Get to know how they work in your community.

## **The Big Picture**

This is a very complex issue and will not be easily solved. The more I learn, the less I know. I started out with just having the idea that this was going to be about changing the narrative – the language used by the media, legislators and others but it is just not that simple.

It is actually very unfortunate that we have to learn these things and worry about protecting ourselves in our work space. Massage therapy has been entangled with prostitution/sex work for over 128 years that we can track and most likely longer.

Currently the media, legislators and even massage boards are referring to massage therapists as working in massage parlors and illicit massage businesses. Using these terms is a very big part of the problem. Using these terms has put the blame on massage therapists. When people hear these terms they think it is a Massage therapist running the parlor when they are not. They think it's a massage therapist gone bad and running an illicit business when it is clearly not.

If they would call them what they are: Massage Parlor = Sex Parlor; Illicit Massage Business = Brothel disguised as a massage business, communities would take notice and get more involved in the problem. This is really a societal issue that has become the problem of the massage profession.

The Media plays a big part in the problem by incorrectly calling places massage parlors or illicit massage businesses. We can gently start correcting it when we see it on news stories and start directly contacting the news sources involved in the messaging.

Our legislators are often misinformed and also use the terms incorrectly. Creating local networks of massage therapists who get together regularly for support and advocacy can help change the narrative.

### **What We Have Now.**

Our licensing laws vary so much in each state that it makes it difficult to work on this problem effectively.

Some of the things that we do have in place but do not know how well they are working are:

- Requiring that a massage business have their license on all advertising and their website.
- Requiring that a massage business have their license hanging on the wall of the office. See <https://www.lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com/massage-licensing-laws-display-of-advertising/>
- Requiring photo IDs with licenses or requiring the massage therapist to carry ID. (Places were having one license hanging on the wall and the people working there did not carry ID so they all claimed that they were the name on the massage license.)
- Having a law that allows inspections of premises.
- Having a law that requires reflexologists to have massage licenses or special training.

The penalties for unlicensed massage vary greatly and these laws are not enforced.

<https://www.lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com/penalties-for-unlicensed-massage/>

There are some changes needed in the massage state laws that could help this process.

**Use of language: massage parlor, masseuse, masseur in laws.** A few states still use these terms to describe a massage therapy business. These words while once were historically appropriate. The meaning is now offensive and indicates a sexually oriented business.

**Advertising Laws.** Many states require that massage therapists include their license number on any and all advertisements to show they are properly trained and licensed. State massage boards also have licensing verification systems so people can also look up the license to confirm it is active and is not under review or has been canceled.

**Display of License Laws.** Many states require that the actual massage license be hanging on the wall of the office and that photo ID be attached or available. A photo ID is required as some SOBs had access to one or two real massage licenses and had them on the wall and when authorities came in, the workers all said it was their license and they did not carry photo ID making it difficult to know if anyone was actually licensed.



**Inspection of Premises.** Being able to inspect a massage business can help make it so authorities can go into the unlicensed and SOB places to inspect the business. It also has created problems for law-abiding businesses as a few have been inaccurately tagged as an SOB and inspections were invasive and inappropriate. Inspectors/law enforcement need to be properly trained by organizations such as [www.humantraffickingtraining.com](http://www.humantraffickingtraining.com)

**City Business Licenses.** Most cities and towns also require official business licenses for tax purposes and a MT provide their massage licensing information to get a city business license. They may also be able to inspect premises for licensing issues which is more about tax investigations. These officials need training also as many have been reported to be harassing legitimate massage therapists.

Other laws could also help the process such as having nuisance laws that would allow neighborhoods to shut places down.

### **Massage Schools**

The problem of diploma mills has plagued the massage profession for many years. The Federation of Massage State Boards released a toolkit to help the profession understand and deal with the problem. [A Toolkit for Identifying Human Trafficking](#) and Fraud in Higher Education Lorna Candler, J.D. and Debra Persinger, Ph.D. Summer 2022

Most states require that massage therapists attend and pass a program from an approved massage school but many states do not actually post a list of approved schools on their websites making it difficult to make sure that these schools are actually approved.

## **It Takes a Network to Defeat a Network.**

One of the main organizations (and only organization I found that is directly working on the issue of brothels disguised as massage businesses) is a non-profit called The Network Team. [www.thenetworkteam.org](http://www.thenetworkteam.org)

The Network Team is a Data and disruption team working for those on the front lines of fighting human trafficking and creating nationwide plan for disrupting these businesses. This 501 (c) 3 nonprofit in Northern Virginia is working with Attorney Generals and Law Enforcement across the US learning how these businesses work to identify vulnerabilities to strategically disrupt it.

Their plan is proprietary information at this point and is meant for Attorney Generals and Law Enforcement Officials only at this time. I attended their 6 session webinar series and spoke with someone from the WA State Attorney General's office who attended their Convening in January 2023. Their Landlord Engagement Program is being implemented in many states. The basic process is being done through the AG offices in each state and involves getting landlords to evict these SOBs. Along with the Landlord Engagement Program is a follow up system of working with city/county business licensing divisions to ensure that these SOBs are not getting business licenses

Quote from their website:

“As retired four-star General Stanley McChrystal once wrote, “To defeat a networked enemy we had to become a network ourselves.”

My research so far shows that this company was previously called the Heyrick Research Group. Heyrick was the company that did the research for the Polaris Project Report on Human Trafficking and the massage profession.

So the Network Team hosted a get together in Los Angeles in Early January 2023 [called the Convening](#). Only people invited were allowed to attend. Attorney Generals from states were invited and many attended. They hosted a [series of webinars](#) on various topics that I was able to attend. . A few of the webinars are now on their Youtube page. <https://www.youtube.com/@thenetwork1104>

There was a previous meeting of the Convening back in 2019 as I found when reading the book [The Historical Roots of Human Trafficking](#): Informing Primary Prevention of Commercialized Violence.

### **5 Steps Proposed by The Network Team to Disrupt Illicit Massage Businesses (CA)**

(<https://youtu.be/KeoVrnnwBxE>)

One of the first webinars was on their overall plan for disrupting these businesses. Much of it is based on what CA is doing and has done. The recent numbers count though shows that CA is one of the fastest growing problems.

1. Update Massage Ordinances  
Example from [San Mateo ordinance 5.44](#) (PDF)
2. Update Your Business Application Process  
Create a very detailed application process something like the one created for [Sunnyvale CA](#).
3. Declaration Process: Create a process where law enforcement can report to the CAMTC who can then suspend their certification.
4. [Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training](#) . POST Certified Training offered by CAMTC
5. Commitment to Inspection – update ordinances, business license applications, declaration process, train and repeat.

*Critique: California is a different situation than all of the other states in that they do not require state licensing. Their program is a voluntary certification process. Many cities are left doing the work that could be done in other ways if the state would implement required state licensing.*

### **Landlord Engagement Program**

Another webinar that they held talked about their main method of dealing with these businesses is their Landlord Engagement Program which I attended. The Missouri Attorney General has implemented this in the form of the [Hope Initiative](#).

This program is complex and requires that a team of organizations get involved to coordinate their efforts in implementing this plan. Contact your Attorney General's office first to see if they attended one of the Convenings and know of this plan. Currently the Network Team is only working with attorney generals and law enforcement officials on this issue.

*Critique: The Landlord Engagement Program will only work if it is implemented at the same time across the US in every city/county in every state. The Asian Cartels' will just move their businesses to other cities and they do it very quickly.*

### **Creating Teams**

This isn't just as simple of engaging landlords but for now it seems the easiest place to start especially since law enforcement across the US is undermanned and overwhelmed. Much more is required to put a stop to this. This whole thing is driven by money—the Johns' who visit these places. The men in our communities who see women as sex objects. The media who portrays Asian Women as sex objects and the women who get caught up in these schemes just looking for a better life.

### **Support systems for survivors.**

The women are severely traumatized. Most do not even think that what is happening to them is a crime and they are just working to provide for their families. They have lost all sense of personal control. It is not only the women, but also their families. They are working to help support their families here and abroad. They have such a long history of Asian discrimination leaves deep wounds in all of us.

### **City council members, legislators and others to create Ordinances.**

The massage laws are filled with loopholes that allow this to happen. The states that do have laws are unable to follow through on investigations and arrests just based on unlicensed practice—for some reason that I just have not been able to figure out what the missing connection is. Cities are trying to create their own ordinances burdening massage therapists with having to jump through more hoops after already attending and passing approved massage school programs, background checks and having their licenses on advertising and in their offices. When cities talk of adding more city or state establishment licensing, they are saying that this is the problem of the massage profession when it is not licensed massage therapists who are the problem...it is the sex businesses that need to have ordinances made and enforced.

### **Law Enforcement.**

Sheriff and police departments need training in how to respond to these businesses. Starting with unlicensed practice laws that should allow them to shut these places down just because they are using the words massage without being licensed. Business licensing laws are another way to approach the businesses and also public nuisance laws.

### **Where is the Massage Therapy Profession?**

We really don't know. The Federation of Massage State Boards had a human trafficking task force back in 2018 and provided a [report on massage and human trafficking](#). They also have a toolkit for massage schools as they found that so many schools were fake and also handing out fake massage licenses.

## The Plan for Disrupting

Start with where you are at. This is a very overwhelming and sensitive topic and is also VERY complex problem. Start reading and learning everything you can about this problem in your community, your city, your county, your state and the US. Attend your city council meetings, meet your county representatives and reach out to your local police or sheriff. Ask them to make an inquiry to the Attorney General's office in your state. The AG's were all invited to the Convening and many states had representatives attending the Convening to learn about the latest processes and how to set up a network in each area. Some are already starting to work on this. If they have not attended or heard about this, send them to [www.thenetworkteam.org](http://www.thenetworkteam.org) and get information.

### Create Awareness

**Hands Off Our Name** is an awareness campaign and is one thing we can do right now...today. Follow the local news stories in your area and let the media know that the correct way to talk about these businesses is to use the terms Sexually Oriented Business (SOB) or something else besides Illicit Massage Business. Download these toolkits to hand out to your local new sources, landlords, law enforcement and the public. <https://www.lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com/toolkits/>

### Creating a Local Network of massage therapists

You don't have to do this alone. It will take years to correct this mess and it will need to be constantly changed as criminals change their approaches and respond to charges. Start with asking 2 or more massage therapists in your close vicinity to meet for coffee or trade massage. Use the time to start talking about your feelings about these places to process your emotions and get help in forming the teams that are needed. You can even make it a money making network for yourself if you so choose. Many AMTA Chapters already have the beginnings of local chapters in place. Start with them and ask what they are doing in this area.

Starting and running a local network can be a great way to connect with other massage therapists in your community/state while promoting your business and the massage therapy profession. Local communities are all different and will be able to figure out what is best for the area. You can research and understand the issues in your community like brothels disguised as massage businesses and work to change the language so that the community understands that they have brothels in the area; not massage parlors. There are also other things to look into like keeping track of what your state boards are doing, changing the CE requirements, getting massage covered by health insurance and other things.

- Start where you are at. Call a few friends you went to massage school or contact the massage businesses around you and ask to meet for coffee to talk about forming a network.
- Start a Facebook Page and Group where you can post events and organize.
- Create a website around the whole network and have it so people can pay to be a member or list a CE class.
- Create monthly meetings around a CE class and potluck/lunch or other social event.

- You can charge a low monthly fee to be a member or charge for individual meetings

### **Changing the Language**

Media and legislators are using the words illicit massage business and massage parlor in their news stories and legislation. This needs to be changed. It is a very simple thing of emailing or contacting the author of the news story or your legislator who is using the incorrect language. There is not a perfect word for this though. If we could start getting the language changed to something that really describes the problem, communities would have a better awareness of what is going on in their area.

Use the terms Sexually Oriented Business, Brothel disguised as a Massage Business, Illicit Sex and Human Trafficking Business...but don't call it massage.

### **Contact Law Enforcement Officials in Your Community**

One of the first things to do when setting up your massage business is to reach out to your local law enforcement officials and let them know you are opening a business in the area. Tell them you are concerned about yourself or your employees in regard to sexual harassment that is seen as a licensed massage therapist. You should start reporting all cases to law enforcement even though they may not seem like they are doing much to help with this issue. They will begin to see the problems in your community.

Let them know you are concerned about the many sexually oriented businesses in your area. If you know of some, point them out and tell them why you are suspicious.

Know your state laws when it comes to the issue of investigating and prosecuting unlicensed so called massage therapists.

Develop a relationship with law enforcement officials. You can start also by following them on social media sites to see what things they are working on. Many are also organizing neighborhood watch programs and meet a cop for coffee events to get to know the members of the community.

One of the other pieces that needs to be in place to start untangling massage therapy from prostitution is the process of working with local law enforcement agencies to be able to report sexual harassment of massage therapists and to also report brothels disguised as massage businesses.

Connect with your local law enforcement agency on Facebook or other social media sites. Look at the things they are dealing with. Many are also reaching out to their communities and having events for the public to come and meet them over coffee or creating community watch groups. Get to know them first.

Call your local law enforcement agency – local police department or sheriff. Ask to speak to whoever handles human trafficking in your area/city. Explain the problem to them.

Tell them that massage therapists or you are routinely contacted by people looking to buy sex and explain how clients may try to ask for sexual services. It is sexual harassment. Explain the licensing process in your state and explain your education, training and that Massage is Therapy – not sex work. In most states there are laws that say only a licensed massage therapist can call themselves a massage

therapist or use the words massage. You can find the laws in your state in the list at the bottom of this page.

Ask to find out their order of operations and what would the process look like for a massage therapist to be able to call with complaints of sexual harassment and to report the brothels.

What kinds of information is required to become actionable and see if it would be possible for them to file field reports for those without enough to act on yet. Find out what unit the crimes would go to like internet and sex crimes division.

They often are not able to do much at first and maybe ever, but it is important to start the process. Don't gripe about them not being able to do anything. Thank them for listening and tell them what you understand the situation to be for that case. Ask other massage therapists in your area to get involved and ask them to do the same thing to connect with law enforcement.

By partnering with your law enforcement we are making it so these businesses are unprofitable in your area. With a network of colleagues united against buyers and making a stand for professionalism we are simultaneously training our community to respect not just the profession but the healthcare advocates who serve in it.

Let your clients know that you are creating relationships with law enforcement in your area to help start stopping these kinds of businesses. Write up a page on your website that explains the laws for becoming a massage therapist and who can use the words massage/massage therapist according to the law in your state.

This is how we play our part. When we know better we will do it. Until then this is how we start.

See also: [MESSAGE THERAPISTS: GET TO KNOW LAW ENFORCEMENT](#) WHERE YOU LIVE Sandy Fritz on Massage Magazine

See the story on her [Facebook Post](#) of how her calls to the local law enforcement agency did shut down a suspicious business.

### **Let the Media Know**

When you see local news stories that use the terms Illicit Massage Business or Massage Parlor email or contact them through social media to let them know that these places are NOT massage anything. See the sample letter in the resources. Correcting the use of words can go a long way in each community. So many just think that these places are massage therapists doing bad things and don't understand what massage therapists actually go through to become licensed in that state.

### **Let Your Legislators Know**

Some states still have language that says a massage business can be called a massage parlor. The words masseuse and masseur are also allowed. Massage and Masseur are outdated terms and are mostly used

by sexually oriented businesses. Better laws need to be created around reflexology, Asian Massage, Thai Massage and the other hiding places of these businesses.

### **Call to Action:**

**Correct the Language:** Create Awareness Campaigns. Ask Polaris to Correct the Terms. Ask other major players to correct the language they use.

**Correct the laws:** Create better laws with more specific language for unlicensed massage, close loopholes in reflexology/foot massage laws, stop establishment licensing and stop the victimization of massage therapists in the US.

**Create Local Networks of Massage Therapists.** It is in our local communities where the changes need to happen. Each community has their own needs and problems. Local networks of therapists need to be informed of the many issues and work together with Attorney Generals, Law Enforcement, Legislators, Governors, and city/county councils.

**Perpetuating Victimization with Efforts to Reduce Human Trafficking: a Call to Action for Massage Therapist Protection** <https://ijtmb.org/index.php/ijtmb/article/download/775/909?inline=1#b35-ijtmb-16-44>

### **Find your state laws and license verification systems**

[Alabama](#)

[Alaska](#)

[Arizona](#)

[Arkansas](#)

[California](#)

[Colorado](#)

[Connecticut](#)

[Delaware](#)

[Florida](#)

[Georgia](#)

[Hawaii](#)

[Idaho](#)

[Illinois](#)

[Indiana](#)

[Iowa](#)

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[Ohio](#)

[Oklahoma](#)

[Oregon](#)

[Pennsylvania](#)

[Rhode Island](#)

[South Carolina](#)

[South Dakota](#)

[Tennessee](#)

[Texas](#)

[Utah](#)

[Vermont](#)

[Virginia](#)

[Washington](#)

[West Virginia](#)

[Wisconsin](#)

[Wyoming](#)

## Appendix

### History of Massage therapy being associated with brothels.

How did we get this way? How did massage end up being the code word for sex workers to hide behind?

**July 14, 1894** – Immoral Massage Establishments British Medical Journal.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2404432/pdf/brmedj08960-0029.pdf>

“WE have received communications suggesting that an association should be formed for those who have gone through a proper course of instruction in massage and obtained certificates of proficiency, and asking our assistance in the preparation of a list of good and satisfactory workers. The suggestion is, however, beset with difficulties. We understand that a good many ” massage shops,” the advertisements of which are frequently inserted in one or two of the fashionable daily papers, are very little more than houses of accommodation. A very common plan, we are informed, is for some man with a little capital to open an establishment of this kind, and then to advertise for half a dozen young lady assistants to do the work. Their remuneration is nominal, but they are at liberty to accept presents from the customers, who pay the principal from half-a-guinea to 2 guineas for each visit. If the young lady is willing to make herself ” agreeable” she is retained on the staff, but if she has conscientious scruples she is discharged and someone is found to take her place. This is so well understood that young men about town often make a tour of these establishments. Many of these girls have certificates, but they, as a rule, have spent their last penny in getting instruction, and, little by little, drift into a mode of life which is often most distasteful to them. The men are often not much better, and it has become a fashionable fad for certain ladies of position to frequent the rooms of a young and good-looking masseur. We are given to understand that the subject has attracted the attention of the police, and that quite recently one of the best known of these places has been raided and stopped. Certificates in ”massage” are given, even by qualified medical men, after the most perfunctory course of instruction. The women are told that they can make a good income, but as soon as they are squeezed dry they are turned out to shift for themselves. Some of the stories of the unfortunate victims which have come to our knowledge are almost incredible. These facts have been conveyed to us privately and on reliable authority, but we fear much difficulty would be experienced in getting these young women to testify in a court of law. Our impression is that the legitimate massage market is overstocked, and that no woman, unless she has a private connection, has the slightest chance of getting a living by massage alone-at all events in London. We are afraid that nothing could be done in the way of registration unless the ground could previously be cleared of what is undoubtedly a great social scandal. It would be difficult, at all events at first, to refuse a place on the list to any woman who has a certificate from a legally qualified practitioner, and yet in many cases such recognition would mean neither more nor less than a recognition of prostitution. This may seem a very strong statement, but we cannot well discredit information which has come to us from very various and well-authenticated sources.”



The fact is, the legal profession is not free from contending interests, and there are yet many grievances which ought to be redressed. On one matter, however, we heartily agree with Dr. Arthur Welford as to the growing power and influence of the British Medical Association. It is true that many are anxious that greater prominence should be given to questions which involve the interests of the profession as a whole, and that during recent years the attention of many of the Branches has been directed to the discussion of social topics and the best remedies for casting out the many evils which surround the practice of medicine in the present day. It must not be forgotten that the Association has long laboured to advocate reforms, to ventilate professional grievances, and to promote protective legislation. Surely it is a matter for great congratulation that the scientific character of the transactions has been thoroughly maintained during the long period of sixty years, and that the policy of the Council, under the guidance of the constitution, has been loyally directed to promote the great purposes for which the Association was originally established. Fortunately the members require no assurance that the Council will embrace every opportunity for rendering our great and world-wide organisation fully adapted to all the requirements of the times, and will persistently endeavour to prove that it is the faithful guardian of the honour and highest interests of the profession.

## PLAGUE IN HONG-KONG.

Our Hong Kong correspondent telegraphs: "There are a few cases of plague still, but the situation is improving."

## MEDICINE IN CHINA.

WHILE acknowledging the value of the thirty-eighth, thirty-ninth, and fortieth reports by the medical officers attached to the Chinese Maritime Customs service and issued by the Inspector-General, we regret to have observed during recent years a progressive falling off in the fulness, scientific value, and punctuality of issue of these reports. Of course the medical officers are in great measure answerable for this. We cannot but think, however, that the delay attending publication has much to do with the deterioration we refer to. A medical officer is not likely to take much pains with a report or to prepare a paper which, from past experience, he knows will not see the light for several

births and deaths in the foreign communities at the various Treaty ports be accurately kept and made on a definite and well-considered plan; and, further, that encouragement be held out to the Customs medical officers to work at and report on the diseases of the country.

## IMMORAL "MESSAGE" ESTABLISHMENTS.

THE Home Secretary has ordered an investigation into the facts which the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL last week brought to notice as to the large and dangerous abuses now existing in establishments ostensibly advertised as "Massage Rooms," etc. At the request of the authorities of Scotland Yard, who have been directed to undertake this inquiry, we have placed them in communication with the medical sources from which our information was derived, and there is good reason to believe that the prompt action of Mr. Asquith in following up the clues which we have furnished will lead to an early repression of some of the abuses at these establishments, abuses which constitute a serious offence against public morality of an insidious and dangerous kind. Meantime, we do not doubt that the newspapers, many of them of a highly reputable position, which have been in the habit of innocently publishing advertisements from some of the worst of these places will see fit to exercise a special care in rejecting those which are *prima facie* suspicious. Already we observe that much greater care is being exercised in this respect than was the case a week ago when we called attention to the subject, and already some of the proprietors of the most objectionable of these establishments have, we are informed, taken alarm, a result which, as our object is repression rather than exposure, is immediately satisfactory.

## PAUPER SCHOOL CHILDREN.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/2/1751/148.1>

**July 21, 1894** – British Medical Journal publishes a reply to the Immoral Massage Establishments statement.

**1894** the British Medical Association (BMA) inquired into the education and practice of massage practitioners in London, and found that prostitution was commonly associated with unskilled workers and debt, often working with forged qualifications. In response, legitimate massage workers formed the Society of Trained Masseuses (now known as the [Chartered Society of Physiotherapy](#)), with an emphasis on high academic standards and a medical model for massage training. [Wikipedia. Massage Parlor](#) Members of the Society were required to pass examinations and were subject to routine surveillance.

[Physiotherapy and the shadow of prostitution](#) (PDF): The Society of Trained Masseuses and the massage scandals of 1894 David A. Nicholls a , Julianne Cheek b a Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand b University of South Australia, Australia Available online 25 October 2005

[In good hands](#) : the history of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, 1894-1994 – full text archive.org

**1895** The Arena Volume 15 There are establishments where the girls are kept as you would keep any other wares for sale, and there are houses where no girls are kept, but where couples repair for indulgence. There are houses that are run only at night and others that are incessant in their operation. There are houses that hide behind a "Furnished Rooms" sign, others that show a dressmaker's plate, others that advertise massage treatment, and others that make no attempt to conceal their character, but brazenly announce "Miss Tillie" or some other such name on the door or window [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Arena/YrBOAQAAMAAJ?q=massage+brothel&gbpv=0#f=false](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Arena/YrBOAQAAMAAJ?q=massage+brothel&gbpv=0#f=false)

**1900** The Society of Trained Masseuses was incorporated and become the Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses. Massage Passport: [History of Massage](#): Professional Societies, Organizations, and Associations

**1900 – 1945** and beyond. “From the beginning of the twentieth century to beyond World War II, two key drivers of large-scale sexual exploitation, specifically of East Asian women and girls, were the aggressive agenda of the Imperial Japanese Army and the proliferation of US military presence throughout the region of East Asia. Throughout the early 1900s, Japan engaged in multiple wars across Asia and the Pacific (Min, 2003). At the time, Japan had a longstanding history of legal prostitution (Min, 2003). To support the extensive war effort, the Japanese government began the mass mobilization of women for military sexual slavery (Min 2003; Tanaka 2002). Government-controlled “comfort stations” were instated as early as 1904 during the Russo-Japanese War (Min 2003; Soh 2008). A “comfort station” was a euphemism for a military brothel, where young women and girls were forced or coerced into prostitution (Min 2003; Soh 2008; Yoshiaki 1998).”

[The Historical Roots of Human Trafficking](#) (pp. 65-66). Springer International Publishing. Kindle Edition.

**Sept. 8, 1929** – WYNNE WOULD CURB MASSAGE LICENSES . A revision of ordinances that will establish more strict requirements for granting massage licenses and greater supervision over masseurs will be asked of the Board of Aldermen this Fall, Health Commissioner Wynne announced yesterday. [Times Machine](#)

**Sept 15, 1929** – “WAR ON MASSAGE FRAUDS DECLARED BY DR. WYNNE. Health Commissioner to Ask Stricter Regulation of the Profession AN effort is to be made this Fall, the Health Department has announced, completely to restore the practice of massage in New York City to its former status as a reliable technical aid to medicine. More than fifty percent of those hired as masseurs were no more than ordinary rubbers. There are more than 1300 licensed masseurs in New York City, 700 of whom are women. ” [Times Machine](#).

**1945** – “After WWII, the United States continued Japan’s prior practice of sexual exploitation in Korea (Vine 2015). With the rapid increase of US military presence in Korea, the demand for commercial sex noticeably increased. Official agreements were made between the United States and Korean governments which resulted in the creation of camp towns surrounding US military bases (Moon 1997; Vine 2015). These districts were designated to provide entertainment and boost morale for US troops stationed abroad, and only US citizens and those who worked in these areas were allowed entry (Hughes et al 2007; Moon 1997). Former Japanese “comfort stations” were soon known as “rest and relaxation” centers, and “comfort women” were then referred to as “entertainers,” among a host of other euphemisms. Although prostitution was and still is illegal in South Korea, the commercial sex industry was rampant in these camp towns (Hughes et al 2007; Moon 1997). Women and girls, predominantly from Korea, the Philippines, and China, were brought into these camp towns to meet the sexual demands of US military men (Hughes et al 2007; Min 2003). Although different than the “comfort stations” in notable ways, these women and girls experienced similar legacies of exploitation by members of the military. In basic economic terms, the bodies of vulnerable Asian women were (still) the

“product” being sold, but now the US military filled the role of the customer, with the South Korean and US governments securing the market (Vine 2015). The official government treaties favored and protected the United States and its servicemen, and soldiers committed sex crimes against women without penalty, in effect receiving total impunity for their actions (Hughes et al 2007). Despite “zero tolerance policies” of the US government, military servicemen rarely receive any legal consequence for crimes committed while stationed abroad (Demick 2002; Fukushima & Kirk 2013; Tabassum & Cornwell 2012; US Department of Defense 2019).”

[The Historical Roots of Human Trafficking \(p. 67\)](#). Springer International Publishing. Kindle Edition.

**Oct 25, 1972** – East Side Massage Parlor Raided 2d Time in a Week: [Times Machine](#)

**Dec. 19, 1972** – “MASSAGE’ PLACES FACE CRACKDOWN. Mayor and Council Leaders Join to Support Controls on Lewd Establishments. Mayor Lindsay and the City Council leaders joined yesterday to support proposed city legislation that would require licensing of all so-called massage parlors that do not belong to recognized medical institutions. [Times Machine](#)

**Jan. 16, 1973** – “Assembly Adopts Curbs On Use of Word Masseur. Bill Aimed at the City. The Assembly today approved a bill that would restrict the use of the word masseur or masseuse to those who meet the standards of education, experience and moral character now required by the state for licensed masseurs and masseuses.

Under the bill introduced by Mr. Levy and passed by a margin of 119 to 25, the word “licensed” would be dropped from the law and the standards would govern all masseurs and masseuses. Violation of the law would be a Class A misdemeanor, with a maximum punishment of one year imprisonment.

State law defines the “massage” as “applying a scientific system of activity to the muscular structure of the human body by means of stroking, kneading, tapping and vibrating with the hands or vibrators for the purpose of improving muscle tone and circulation.” [New York Times](#)

**Feb. 8, 1973** – Council Group Backs Massage Controls. Tighter controls over massage parlors and higher rates for towing disabled autos were backed yesterday by the City Council’s Committee on Consumer Affairs. [Times Machine](#)

**March 20, 1973** – “Lindsay Signs Bill Requiring Licenses In Massage Parlors. Mayor Lindsay signed into law yesterday a bill intended to wipe out sex from massage parlors. At the same time, enforcement officials geared to cope with anticipated subterfuges to keep prostitution going under the guise of other types of legal businesses.

City permits for masseurs and masseuses will be issued by the Consumer Affairs Department to persons who have received a state license after having 800 hours of instruction from accredited massage schools or to anyone of good moral character who furnishes medical certificates showing him or her to be free of communicable diseases and to persons who are registered at accredited schools. Violators will be subject to a maximum punishment of 90 days in prison and a \$500 fine. Landlords who lease to illegal massage parlors can be fined \$100 for every day the parlor is in business.” [Times Machine](#). [Full Text](#).

**Aug. 26, 1973** – “Professional masseurs, who use massage to soothe and relax other people, are themselves anxious these days about how the public views their profession. Years of bad publicity generated by the so-called “massage parlors” have hurt business, they say, and most are hopeful that a new state law will help improve the public’s image of massage. Mrs. Gertrude J. Fuller, director of the American Institute of Professional Massage, who is also secretary of the New York State Society of Medical Masseurs, agrees, saying that the bad publicity is “only a temporary thing.”” The Article further talks about the Swedish Institute, one of the oldest massage schools and then says: ““What most people don’t know is that the city had an excellent law,” he said. “Then in 1968 the state law took over and said you don’t have to be licensed if you don’t want to. That’s when the massage parlors opened up. “Massage was always the lowest rung on healing-profession ladder to begin with, and this has kept it there. I don’t think the new law is going to help it any.”” [Times Machine. Full Text.](#)

**Jan. 17, 1974** – “To Topless Masseuses, Job Has Cool Aspects. Eight former topless masseuses are seeking a State Employment Security Commission order giving them their old jobs, back pay and the **right to unionize and eat submarine sandwiches**. The women contend they were dismissed by the American Massage Parlor in Ann Arbor after organizing in October to fight what they called harassment by management.” [Times Machine.](#)

**April 17, 1973** – “licensed Masseurs Sue City to Exempt Them in New Law. State-licensed masseurs and masseuses, up in arms over a city law scheduled to go into effect tomorrow, a law actually aimed at massage parlors, have filed suit in State Supreme Court to prevent the law’s being applied to them.” [Times Machine.](#)

**Dec. 22, 1973** – HODAS IS CLEARED IN TWO BOMBINGS. But Two Are Convicted in ‘Massage Parlor’ Fires Martin J. Hodas, the reputed “porno king,” has been acquitted of charges of fire-bombing two competitive “massage parlors” on West 42d Street. In testimony at the trial, it was alleged that the two businesses were fire-bombed after their owners failed to comply with orders allegedly from Mr. Hodas that they not lower their prices for a 15-minute “massage.” [Times Machine.](#)

**April 17, 1974** – “Bar on Massages Dropped. The city of Philadelphia told a Federal court today that it would not enforce a city ordinance forbidding massages by persons to those of the opposite sex. The Velvet . Touch massage parlor filed a suit in United States District Court after several of its. masseuses had been arrested for violating the ordinance.” [Times Machine](#)

**June 9, 1974** – “Prostitution Is Flourishing In Rich ‘Exurban Market. A ‘Local’ Isn’t a Bus Run. The business of prostitution, embracing modern marketing techniques and skirting the law, is branching out from its downtown closet into Middle America. Like its cousin the blue movie, today’s brothel is likely to be right around the corner — in the form of a massage parlor, lotion studio, nude photo club, sexual intercourse school, escort service, dial-a-massage, sauna bath house or some other thinly disguised supermarket for sexual services.” [Times Machine.](#)

**Dec 11, 1975** – “Zoners Ban ‘Massage Parlors’ in Times Square In an effort to force so-called massage parlors out of the Times Square area, the City Planning Commission unanimously approved a zoning

amendment yesterday that would require “physical culture or health establishments” to be either in hotels having more than 200 rooms or in community facilities.

The commission’s vote to zone out the so-called massage parlors marks the first time a municipality has attempted to employ land-use controls in its fight against what authorities have labeled houses of prostitution in disguise. Licensing of the parlors has been tried, but has failed.

Under the amendment approved yesterday, the only physical-culture establishments permitted outside large hotels or community facilities are those having regulation-size swimming pools, tennis courts or similar equipment. This language is intended to leave untouched legitimate gymnasiums, reducing salons and steam baths. [“Times Machine” . Full Text](#)

**Dec. 15, 1975** – “Massage Parlor Fight on Coast Snagged by Curb on the Police LOS ANGELES, Dec. 14 A stumbling block has arisen to a controversial but apparently effective new effort to shut down so-called massage parlors and other sex shops, which the authorities say are really bordellos, by stationing uniformed policemen outside to stop and question patrons.” [Times Machine.](#)

**March 5, 1976** – Luxor Baths Being Secretly Converted Into a 9-Story Luxury Massage Parlor Shoes Left Behind Clue to Occupants Arrests Promised The nine-story Luxor Baths, long a famous Times Square gathering place for men in show business, the sporting set and the garment industry, is being converted secretly and illegally into one of the most lavish “massage parlors” in the country. [Times Machine.](#)

**July 1977.** 4 Groups Are Key Landlords For Midtown Sex Industry: A review of real-estate records by The New York Times showed that the 30 establishments—“massage parlors,” book and peep-show shops with film-viewing machines, live sex shows, topless bars, movie theaters featuring explicit sex films and hotels catering to prostitutes—make up about one-quarter of all such places in the midtown area. [NY Times](#)

**Nov. 19, 1978** – “Drive Against ‘Massage Parlors’ In New York Is Gaining Strength As a result of a new zoning amendment passed by New York City’s Board of Estimate, the clock has begun to tick in the city’s newest effort to wipe out so-called massage parlors. The amendment defines an “adult physical-culture establishment” as any establishment, club or business that offers or advertises massages, body rubs, alcohol rubs, baths or similar treatment by members of the opposite sex. It excludes from this definition establishments that provide services by a licensed physician, licensed operator of electrolysis equipment and those that offer instruction in the martial arts or organized athletic activities. It also excludes barbershops or beauty parlors that offer massage to the scalp, face, neck and shoulders only.” [Times Machine](#)

**August 12, 1979** – “Therapy Association Combats Current ‘Massage’ Connotation. HARTFORD, Aug.10— “Protein is a poison—when you get bitten by a snake, it’s pure protein,” said Jo Willard, as the audience at the 34th annual convention of the *American Massage and Therapy Association* listened in rapt attention. But the massage therapists also wanted to talk about the confusion between their craft, which they call “the oldest of the healing arts,” and another profession, which is known simply as the world’s oldest.

The so-called “massage parlor,” they said, is usually a front for prostitution *or* other illicit sexual activity.” Our objection is that they go in disguise,” said Jim Morton, whose card notes that he is licensed by the State of Nebraska to operate his Omaha studio. He said that, like most legitimate massage therapists, he wanted to avoid confusion with “massage parlors.” [Times Machine](#). [Full Text](#)

**1980** Texas laid a critical legal foundation for the protection of massage therapist occupational licensing across the country – a decision that would have broad implications for the industry. In 1980, a case came before the Fifth Circuit of the US Court of Appeals. The case dealt with a recent occupational licensing law in Texas pertaining to massage therapists. Three years previously, on July 21, 1977, the state legislature had passed a statute that permitted the “commissioners court of any county . . . (to) adopt regulations applicable to the practice of Licensing massage therapists, massage and operation of massage establishments...” (Harper v Lindsay, 1980). This meant that Commissioners Courts, the governing bodies of a county, could pass local ordinances regulating the industry and could potentially create a myriad web of licensing laws within the state. In total, 22 plaintiffs then filed a suit that challenged the Texas statute and claimed that “certain provisions of the county’s massage parlor regulations exceeded the legislative authority of the Commissioners Court, and that enforcement of the regulations would violate plaintiffs’ constitutional and statutory rights.” This case became known as Harper v Lindsay (1980). Instead, the US Court of Appeals largely upheld the Texas statute on the grounds that the legislature had the authority to protect the public health and safety – a precedent that dates back to the first US Supreme Court case on occupational licensing, Dent v West Virginia (1889). *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy* Vol. 10 No. 1, 2021 pp. 1-14 2045-2101 [DOI 10.1108/JEPP-06-2020-0034](#)

[Harper v. Lindsay](#) – from casetext.com

**June 28, 1981** – “MASSAGE-PARLOR BAN EXTENDED WESTBROOK ”HOW gross do we get? There’s a silent majority out there and we have to decide just what we want – we’ve got to speak up,” said First Selectman Donald P. Morrison after 150 members at last week’s Town Meeting voted unanimously to adopt an ordinance banning massage parlors.” [Times Machine](#)

**Feb 8, 1987** – WHAT’S NEW IN MASSAGE: DON’T say “masseuse.” Massage practitioners who are moving their vocation into the mainstream say the term has unfortunate associations with prostitution. They prefer “massage therapist” or “bodywork practitioner.” “With the emphasis on health and wellness, massage therapy is one of several choices people are making to improve their quality of life,” said Robert King, president of the *American Massage Therapy Association*, the industry group that has the strictest training requirements for membership. The association has seen its membership grow from 1,100 in 1980 to 5,335 this year. The number of massage-therapy schools it has approved has also jumped, to 47 from 11.” [Times Machine](#). [Full Text](#).

**1988** – National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) created by the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA). which provided the seed money for startup. The NCE was originally started as an AMTA entrance exam and quickly moved to becoming a national exam which



we all know is not so national. See also: [History of National Certification Board](#) in Massage and Bodywork. The purpose of creating this organization was to bring more credibility to the profession.

**Feb 16, 1992** – “Local Laws Irk Massage Therapists “WE’RE really taking a beating,” said Tina Yoxtheimer, a massage therapist in Bridgeport, with a shrug of resignation. The city’s Common Council had just enacted an ordinance requiring her to apply to the Police Department for a permit to practice therapeutic massage.” [Times Machine](#). [Full Text](#)

**Sept. 17, 1995** – NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT: FLUSHING. Pickets Help Uproot Suspected Brothel, but Battle Goes On. [Times Machine](#)

**June 22, 1996** – **Massage Finds New Believers** “After decades of being relegated to the margins of hedonistic exercise for the pampered and bored — or worse, a wink-and-nod cover for prostitution — massage, one of the oldest health treatments, is out of the parlor and finding enormous popularity among millions of Americans, from athletes to the aged.

With many of its techniques rooted in 4,000-year-old Chinese beliefs, massage is being used as a counterbalance in the lives of the exercise-exhausted and stressed-out. Indeed, the various styles of massage are quickly becoming as familiar to many as the best brands of low-fat yogurt. Even the Internet is loaded with thousands of Web sites and bulletin boards touting the “regenerative” virtues of massage. According to the American Massage Therapy Association, the oldest and largest group representing massage therapists, there are 120,000 to 150,000 massage therapists in the United States. (The industry has discarded the terms “masseur” and “masseuse” as not sounding professional.) Membership in the 52-year-old organization — now 24,000 — more than doubled between 1990 and 1995, it said.” [Times Machine](#)

2000 – United States Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000. The Act was reauthorized in 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2013

2017 – Polaris Project Report: [Human Trafficking in Illicit Massage Businesses Report](#) (PDF) (No longer found on the Polaris Website but found in other places.)

2017 : Federation of Massage State Boards Report on [Human Trafficking Taskforce Report](#). (PDF)

2019 – First Convening held by [The Network Team](#)

“Six anti-trafficking organizations co-hosted the National Convening to End Trafficking in the Illicit Massage Industry in the Washington, D.C. area.<sup>21</sup> This 2-day conference hosted 240 attendees from 30 states.” [The Historical Roots of Human Trafficking](#) (p. 79). Springer International Publishing. Kindle Edition.

September 2022 – [A Toolkit for Identifying Human Trafficking and Fraud in Higher Education](#) (PDF)

2023 – January. Second Convening held in Los Angeles, CA. by [The Network Team](#)

## Plan for Disrupting Sexually Oriented Businesses Using the Words Massage/Massage Therapy to Hide Their Illicit Businesses and to Protect Massage Therapists.

This toolkit is specifically designed for leaders of the massage therapy profession to start creating local networks of massage therapists who work together with community leaders, legislators, law enforcement, survivor services and others to change the narrative as to how the massage therapy is thought of in our communities. This will in turn help to reduce the number of sexually oriented businesses (SOBs) disguising themselves as massage businesses and hiding human trafficking.

There is no denying that this problem is growing despite the massage professions best efforts at licensing, legislation and professional development requirements. It is not only the human trafficking problem, but the fallout from these businesses using the good name of massage/massage therapy.

Massage therapists are continually harassed and assaulted by people who are assuming that all massage places are giving these extra services. They have had to take extra training in how to deal with these sex hobbyists to keep themselves safe. They have had to set rules for screening clients, adjusted work hours, adjusted policies and even hired security guards to go along with mobile massage businesses. This has increased the cost of doing business and has probably has added to the shortage of massage therapists across the US.

The recent commentary in the International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork March 2023, **Perpetuating Victimization with Efforts to Reduce Human Trafficking: a Call to Action for Massage Therapist Protection** (<https://ijtmb.org/index.php/ijtmb/article/download/775/909?inline=1#b35-ijtmb-16-44>), describes the problem in detail and points out how the massage therapy profession has perpetuated the problem. They make a clear call to action to our leaders in the massage therapy profession and all massage therapists:

**“CONCLUSIONS:** Coordinated efforts to reduce sexual slavery, represented as massage therapy, have focused on credentialing and regulations despite organized crime networks using fraudulent documentation. Massage therapists are not prostitutes or sex workers; perpetrators engage in illegal, deviant behaviors by soliciting sexual favors in the treatment room. Routinely minimizing and normalizing these behaviors could be considered systemic industry sex discrimination. Established processes and procedures for reporting individual instances of SH, including solicitation and sexual assault, do not currently exist in the massage field but would create a systematic approach to document a predatory course of conduct across multiple therapists. Systematic and organized reporting efforts, championed by professional massage organizations across states, government agencies, and massage therapists, would be a supportive step to protect massage consumers, massage therapists, and sex trafficking victims from the direct effects of sexualized client-initiated behaviors in massage workplaces. Until that becomes a reality, massage therapists will need to know specific harassment or related laws in their states to document and report sexualized behavior in the face of systemic stigma and to collectively advocate for the right to a safe workplace as a civil right.”



We really have two separate issues: The language being used to describe these SOB's and the fact that these businesses are often hiding human trafficking.

## The Language Being Used

Media, legislators, law enforcement officials and the public are being confused by the terms **Illicit Massage Business** and **Massage Parlor** that are used to describe SOB's in our communities. The Polaris Project Report of 2017, coined the term "**Illicit Massage Business**" to describe these businesses. The Federation of Massage State Boards report on Human Trafficking in 2017

(<https://www.fsmtb.org/media/1606/http-report-final-web.pdf>) noted that there was some concern over the language being used.

"This report uses the term Illicit Businesses to describe establishments that use massage and bodywork as a front for their illegal activity. Polaris uses the term Illicit Massage Business to denote businesses using massage and bodywork as a front for human trafficking. We have inferred that use of the term 'illicit' alongside 'massage businesses' is not intended to delegitimize law-abiding massage businesses or associate them in any way with schemes that are engaged in human trafficking. Illicit Massage Business is a commonly used anti-trafficking term which is defined as an enterprise that purports to offer massage services but instead offers commercial sex."

## Would you call a theft ring disguised as plumbers and illicit plumber?

The word Massage Parlor has been removed from the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). Businesses that provide massage therapy services are under NAICS 621399, Offices of All Other Miscellaneous Health Practitioners. Massage Parlor was previously under NAICS 81299 and has been removed from the codes. This incorrect use of language is harming the massage therapy profession.

## Our Licensing Laws and Rules

Our licensing laws vary so much in each state that it makes it difficult to work on this problem effectively.

Some of the things that have helped are:

- Requiring that a massage business have their license on all advertising and their website.
- Requiring that a massage business have their license hanging on the wall of the office. See <https://www.lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com/massage-licensing-laws-display-of-advertising/>
- Requiring photo IDs with licenses or requiring the massage therapist to carry ID. (Places were having one license hanging on the wall and the people working there did not carry ID so they all claimed that they were the name on the massage license.)
- Having a law that allows inspections of premises.

- Having a law that requires reflexologists to have massage licenses or special training.

The Penalties for Unlicensed Massage vary greatly and these laws are not enforced. There are some changes needed in the massage state laws that could help this process. See more at:

<https://www.lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com/penalties-for-unlicensed-massage/>

**Use of language: massage parlor, masseuse, masseur in laws.** A few states still use these terms to describe a massage therapy business. These words while once were historically appropriate. The meaning is now offensive and indicates a sexually oriented business.

**Advertising Laws.** Many states require that massage therapists include their license number on any and all advertisements to show they are properly trained and licensed. State massage boards also have licensing verification systems so people can also look up the license to confirm it is active and is not under review or has been canceled.

**Display of License Laws.** Many states require that the actual massage license be hanging on the wall of the office and that photo ID be attached or available. A photo ID is required as some SOB had access to one or two real massage licenses and had them on the wall and when authorities came in, the workers all said it was their license and they did not carry photo ID making it difficult to know if anyone was actually licensed.

**Inspection of Premises.** Being able to inspect a massage business can help make it so authorities can go into the unlicensed and SOB places to inspect the business. It also has created problems for law-abiding businesses as a few have been inaccurately tagged as an SOB and inspections were invasive and inappropriate.

**City Business Licenses.** Most cities and towns also require official business licenses for tax purposes and a MT provide their massage licensing information to get a city business license. Other laws could also help the process such as having nuisance laws that would allow neighborhoods to shut places down.

**Establishment Licensing.** Some states have already implemented special establishment licensing laws that require that a massage therapist take extra steps to prove they are not a SOB. This is redundant and not supported by AMTA or ABMP yet they continue to pass in some states legislatures. A study needs to be done to tell if these laws are working. After looking at the increasing number of these SOB, I would say they are not working anywhere.

Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Vermont have what are called Establishment Licensing laws. The language in these vary greatly and there has been no research done on whether or not this is helping or if it is the best way to disrupt these businesses from using the name of massage to disguise prostitution and human trafficking.

## The Network Team's Plan for Disrupting

The Network Team (<https://www.thenetworkteam.org/>) is a Data and disruption team working for those on the front lines of fighting human trafficking and creating nationwide plan for disrupting these businesses. This 501 (c) 3 nonprofit in Northern Virginia is working with Attorney Generals and Law Enforcement across the US learning how these businesses work to identify vulnerabilities to strategically disrupt it.

Their plan is proprietary information at this point and is meant for Attorney Generals and Law Enforcement Officials only at this time. I attended their 6 session webinar series and spoke with someone from the WA State Attorney General's office who attended their Convening in January 2023. Their Landlord Engagement Program is being implemented in many states. The basic process is being done through the AG offices in each state and involves getting landlords to evict these SOBs. Along with the Landlord Engagement Program is a follow up system of working with city/county business licensing divisions to ensure that these SOBs are not getting business licenses.

Quote from their website (<https://www.thenetworkteam.org/about>) : "As retired four-star General Stanley McChrystal once wrote, "To defeat a networked enemy we had to become a network ourselves."

### Call to Action:

**Correct the Language** : Create Awareness Campaigns. Ask Polaris to Correct the Terms. Ask other major players to correct the language they use.

**Correct the laws**: Create better laws with more specific language for unlicensed massage, close loopholes in reflexology/foot massage laws, stop establishment licensing and stop the victimization of massage therapists in the US.

**Create Local Networks of Massage Therapists**. It is in our local communities where the changes need to happen. Each community has their own needs and problems. Local networks of therapists need to be informed of the many issues and work together with Attorney Generals, Law Enforcement, Legislators, Governors, and city/county councils.