

House Bill 374
Proponent Testimony
November 19th, 2020
House Commerce and Labor Committee
Barry Sheets, Citizens for Community Values

Thank you Chair Manning, Vice Chairman Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the Commerce and Labor Committee for this opportunity to share our organization's support of House Bill 374, which would grant local governments authority to better protect the health and safety of their citizenry relative to the operations of massage establishments.

I am Barry Sheets, legislative liaison for Citizens for Community Values, the non-profit Family Policy Council working with Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council and the Alliance Defending Freedom.

House Bill 374 sets up three major provisions in law: providing township government with an option to craft regulations governing the operation (zoning, hours of operation, health/safety/welfare) of massage establishments locating in the unincorporated areas of the township; providing a penalty for failure to have appropriate licensure to perform massage services at establishments in these areas; and updating current registration requirements to help protect against human trafficking.

There are numerous media reports regarding the issues that surround the "relaxation"-style massage parlors. A cursory review shows a number of such establishments having employees being charged with prostitution, soliciting, or even human trafficking operations as individuals being trafficked are moved in and out of these establishments with relative ease, as there is little in the way of paperwork or licensure to track to determine if the individual is a legitimate employee or a victim of trafficking.

These types of establishments differ greatly from those offering therapeutic, or medical, massage services, which focus on health-related issues such as back pain, tendonitis, and sports injuries, and are provided in a clinical setting. Therapeutic establishments hire individuals who are licensed or are training to seek licensure by the state in their area of expertise. Individuals wishing to provide therapeutic massage in Ohio must be licensed by the State Medical Board.

This is not the case in the majority of the "relaxation" massage establishments. Often, there is little to no training and certainly no licensure. Also, the types of massage services in many "relaxation" spa-type settings include, or are negotiated between the masseuse and the client to include, sexual gratification services--commonly known as prostitution or paying for a sexual encounter. A number of the media reports include undercover officers being offered sexual services by the individuals working in these establishments.

The problem is growing. According to David McCafferty, central supervisor of investigations for the State Medical Board of Ohio, there has been "a 1,000 percent increase over the last five years...in central Ohio, about five to six years ago, there were maybe only six or seven such businesses and, at last count, there were more than 60 in operation."

As municipalities are more closely investigating and regulating the operations of these establishments, they seek to move to locations where such close inspection or regulation doesn't currently exist: the unincorporated areas of townships. Our township governments need the tools that House Bill 374 provides in order to combat a growing problem.

The bill's provisions to clearly establish proper licensure requirements for individuals seeking to work in such establishments is another means to root out the illegal practices and fronts for human trafficking operations, and provide both workers and clients with re-assurance that the facility is above-board and that the personnel have adequate training and certifications to do an appropriate and effective massage.

We look forward to the favorable passage of this measure from committee, and I would be happy to take any questions you may have.