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Honorable Gayle Manning, Chairman
House Commerce and Labor Committee
77 South High St., 12th Floor
Columbus, Oh. 43215

Dear Chairwoman Manning,

I write today to offer my support for House Bill 374, which I believe would greatly assist the ongoing battle against human trafficking happening across Ohio.

A loophole exists in current Ohio law that allows some massage operators to conduct business without licensed employees based solely on how the services are described. If an individual performs a massage for a medical or therapeutic purpose, they are considered massage therapists and training and a state-issued license is required. If the same individual performs a similar massage purely for relaxation or a non-therapeutic purpose, no training or licensure is required. It is these so called "relaxation massage parlors" that are often used by human trafficking rings where women are made to provide sex under the guise of massage. Last year, nearly two dozen such operations in Ohio were investigated or closed down entirely. In Northeast Ohio, 13 massage parlors across 7 counties were raided as part of a coordinated investigation by law enforcement. Several members of this human trafficking ring were brought up on charges by a grand jury as a result of these raids.

The passage of House Bill 374 will not only create uniform regulatory standards for massage, it will also make it more difficult for these businesses to be used to promote human trafficking. Employees will be required to be trained and licensed, and state inspectors will have better access to these facilities to check not only for public health concerns, but also for potential illicit activity.

My hope is that this legislation will help shine a light in a dark place, and put an end to this line of business as a possible front for promoting human trafficking.

I applaud Representatives Manchester and Plummer for their leadership on this important and timely issue. I would be happy to discuss this bill with you and members of your committee at your convenience.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Yost".

Dave Yost
Ohio Attorney General