

Chairman Burke, Vice-Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio Chapter of the American Massage Therapy Association. My name is Melissa Ryan and I serve as the Legislative Chairman for the Ohio Chapter.

The State of Ohio has a lot to be proud of with regard to Massage Therapy. Ohio was the first state to license massage over 103 years ago. We are the only state to be licensed by the State Medical Board and constitute the 2nd largest constituency that the Medical Board oversees, behind licensed physicians. Ohio also has among the highest educational standards for Massage Therapists in the nation.

What Ohio should not be proud of is the stain put on our profession by bad actors, who masquerade as massage professionals, while engaging in human trafficking and prostitution. Because of a loophole in the law that allows an unlicensed person to practice “relaxation massage,” the unsavory business of “Massage Parlors” has contributed to Ohio ranking 4th in the country for Human Trafficking.

All an individual has to do is to claim to be performing massage that is not for the purpose of “treating” a physical condition or impairment and the requirement for licensure is excused. With this loophole in existence numerous “Massage Parlor’s” have opened their doors in just about every major city in the state and these businesses are not governed by the State Medical Board as they only have jurisdiction over a Licensed Massage Therapist. Because of this lack of jurisdiction, if a “massage parlor” is suspected of engaging in illegal activity, it requires local law enforcement to have to do an extensive investigation to demonstrate the legal basis for a raid. If anyone purporting to engage in massage had to follow State Medical Board supervision, identifying and shutting-down those illegal activities would be much easier.

AMTA-OH has helped numerous municipalities throughout the state to draft ordinances to help shut down these “Massage Parlors”. However, without Senate Bill 105 all these unsavory characters would have to do is to move outside city limits and into Ohio’s townships to continue skirting licensing requirements. The overwhelming need to regulate any and all massage being done in our state is all too evident.

Legitimate licensed Massage Therapy is gaining recognition every day for our roll in non-narcotic pain control and with the referrals increasing at a steady rate, the need to ensure public safety is increasing as well. The physician’s that are referring their patients to massage therapists all too often are not aware of this lack of licensure and I have heard numerous accounts of people going to what they thought was a legitimate massage establishment only to find the business was a cover for prostitution.

As the owner myself of a medically based massage clinic, I have to always keep in mind that any new client could be someone seeking a different kind of massage than what we offer and the safety of our therapists. S.B. 105 is desperately needed to protect the women who are the victims of Human Trafficking, the general public looking for legitimate massage and the many, many Licensed Massage Therapists working diligently to promote massage for non-sexual, non-narcotic pain control. AMTA-OH, which represents more than 3,200 of the nearly 12,000 massage therapists in Ohio, we ask that you please vote Yes on S.B. 105 to accomplish this goal.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.