

Suzanne Marshall
Ohio House Commerce and Labor Committee
May 25, 2021
House Bill 81 - Opposition

Chair Stein, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the Committee:

My name is Suzanne Marshall, and I live in Columbus, Ohio. I'm a newly graduated trainee of the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education. I have spent thousands of dollars, six months away from home, and the last eight months at home to fulfill the 800 credit hours that are required to fulfill my training. Soon I'll be applying for certification through the Feldenkrais Guild of North America to become a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher®.

As a survivor of sexual abuse, I greatly appreciate the efforts of Senators Brenner, Fedor, Kunze and Yuko to fight human trafficking in the state of Ohio. My earliest experiences of sexual abuse took place when I was very young, in places that were familiar, right under the noses of people who would have given anything to protect me. So I know what it feels like to be held captive, if only for a short period of time. I know what it feels like to be reduced to an object for someone else's gratification. I know what it feels like to have to pretend that everything is fine, while silently dying inside.

While I support legislation that prevents sexual abuse, protects survivors, and reduces the rates of sexual slavery, I see an issue with House Bill 81 that I cannot overlook in regards to the work that I am so passionately pursuing.

The new proposed definition of massage as introduced in House Bill 81 is so broad as to include "touch" in its list of massage techniques. Without the proper exemptions, this new definition and the massage therapy licensure requirements could be interpreted to apply to anyone who uses touch in their work with the public, regardless of the scope of their practice, or their certifications and affiliations with professional organizations.

House Bill 81 is designed to solve problems with human trafficking and other illicit activity related to the practice of massage. The Feldenkrais Method® has never been associated with or used as a front for these kinds of activities.

The kinds of people that come to do this work are people like me. They are introspective. They are passionate. They want to change the world by facilitating the kind of learning that enables humans to lead lives that are more dignified, more free, and more full of possibilities.

The Feldenkrais Method is about learning how to move from the inside out. In Feldenkrais® lessons, we use gentle, mindful movement to cultivate awareness. Feldenkrais teachers use verbal cues and/or touch to bring their client's attention to

various aspects of their movement. The advantage of using touch in this work is that it provides feedback to a client's nervous system that they can feel. Touch in the Feldenkrais Method is a tool for cultivating awareness. We utilize touch for the purpose of education. Feldenkrais lessons can offer better mobility and function for people of all ages with neurological disorders, developmental delays, chronic pain, and injuries including brain damage.

For survivors of sexual abuse, like myself, the Feldenkrais Method can be an invaluable tool for the journey back to wholeness. Sexual abuse has a way of creating separation between a person's thoughts, feelings, memories, and their sense of themselves. It changes the way we experience our bodies. Somatic education offers us a way back into our bodies by changing our habitual ways of moving and expanding our awareness to include parts of ourselves that have been cast off from the whole. I have experienced this kind of reintegration through the Feldenkrais Method as sensations of stability, of security, of aliveness, of power and as a sense of possibility and freedom for myself.

In the words of Moshe Feldenkrais: "Movement is life. Life is a process. Improve the quality of movement and we improve the quality of life itself."

Without careful consideration, House Bill 81 could affect my right to practice the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education in Ohio. It is important that we fight to end human trafficking, but it is also important that we do so in a way that does not restrict the freedom of survivors of sexual abuse—or any person, for that matter—to choose methods of education that suit them. I am asking that House Bill 81 be amended to include an exemption for people who practice somatic, or movement education, and adhere to the training, competency and ethical standards of their professional organization.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today.