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Representative Dick Stein, Chair  
Representative Mark Johnson, Vice Chair  
Representative Michele Lepore-Hagan, Ranking Member  
Commerce and Labor Committee

May 10, 2021

Support for HB 81, Revise laws governing massage establishments / massage therapy

Dear Representatives;

Abolition Ohio is the Miami Valley's Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition. Our membership includes over 30 organizations and 200 individuals across southwest Ohio. We work to prevent human trafficking, protect victims and survivors, and assist law enforcement in prosecuting traffickers.

House Bill 81 is needed because it will help reduce commercial sex and human trafficking (both sex and labor trafficking) in the state of Ohio. It will empower unincorporated townships to pass ordinances to regulate massage businesses. Closing the "relaxation massage loophole" will greatly simplify (and reduce the cost) of law enforcement operations to shut down illicit massage businesses.

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, Illicit Massage/Spa Businesses are the number one venue for sex trafficking in the US. In Ohio, which is #5 in the nation for cases reported to the national hotline, illicit massage/spa businesses are the second most common type of sex trafficking venue reported.

In 2019, a massive law enforcement operation raided 13 illicit massage businesses in northeast Ohio as part of a human trafficking investigation. Also, three massage parlors near Columbus were shut down for suspicion of human trafficking and prostitution. Similar raids have been conducted over the past few years in many Ohio cities.

This is a major national and state-wide issue. A national study conducted by Heyrick Research last year identified over 10,000 illicit massage businesses across all fifty states. At the University of Dayton, we currently are conducting a study of illicit massage businesses across Ohio (to be released this Spring). A search of commercial sex advertisement and review websites conducted earlier this year revealed

approximately 300 illicit massage/spa businesses in Ohio. A look at media articles from the past few decades uncovered that over 30 police departments across the state have conducted raids, investigations, or arrests at illicit massage parlors / spas. And, the rate of these law enforcement actions has been increasing through the years.

The membership of Abolition Ohio strongly supports passage of House Bill 81 because we see it as a common sense way to reduce sex and labor exploitation and trafficking. We urge you to support this bill. I thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ANTHONY TALBOTT' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Anthony "Tony" Talbott

Director