



Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health committee, my name is James Specker, and I am the Director of Government and Industry Relations for the American Massage Therapy Association. I would like to thank you for bringing Senate Bill 55 before this committee and allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio Chapter of the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA-OH).

The State of Ohio has a lot to be proud of regarding Massage Therapy. Ohio was the first state to license massage over 104 years ago. As medical professionals, we are licensed by the State Medical Board and have some of the best massage therapists in the nation.

What Ohio should not be proud of, is the stain put on our profession by the issue of Human Trafficking and the realization of how many ways the issue affects the medical massage industry.

The most glaring example would be the unsavory business of "Massage Parlors" which has greatly contributed to Ohio ranking 4th in the country for Human Trafficking. This in large part is possible because Ohio is in an unfortunately unique position with a loophole in the law that allows an unlicensed person to practice what is commonly referred to as "relaxation massage." The snag here is that there is no true legal definition for that term. All an individual must 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, many "Massage Parlors" have opened their doors in just about every major city in Ohio. These businesses are not governed by State Medical Board as they only have jurisdiction over a Licensed Massage Therapist, and in fact these practitioners are not governed by any state agency, and unless the local legislators have passed an ordinance, there is no jurisdiction over their activities without law enforcement having to conduct a sting operation when there is suspected illegal activities. These operations are costly and time consuming. With state law as it stands, no one has the authority to govern or inspect these establishments to ensure they are operating on the up and up.

AMTA-OH has helped numerous municipalities throughout the state, including the City of Westerville, to draft ordinances to help shut down these Massage Parlors. However, without Senate Bill 55, these individuals must only move outside of city limits to avoid the enforcement of such an ordinance. Even with the lack of regulation as it stands today, a Licensed Massage Therapist that has had their license revoked for any number of reasons can continue to work, as long as they discontinue any reference to them being licensed. There are currently an untold number of massage practitioners that have either had their license revoked, or have voluntarily decided to not keep their license active. There is no way to regulate whether or not these individuals are limiting their practice to "Relaxation Massage." Again, 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 its' role in non-narcotic pain control. With referrals increasing at a steady rate, the need to ensure public safety is ever more important. The physicians that are referring their patients to massage therapists are all too often unaware of this lack of licensure; I have heard numerous accounts of people going to what they thought was a legitimate massage establishment only to find that it is a cover for prostitution.

We are far too often contacted by an LMT who has had to field text or email inquiries from individuals looking for illicit services from legitimate licensed therapists. Unfortunately, with most of the illicit business being conducted in "Massage Parlors", LMTs are often assumed to be conducting the same business. Although rare, we have had LMTs that have literally had to ask their client to leave because they either could not keep their hands off themselves, or at times off the therapist. There have been occasions when LMTs have had to call the police in fear of either being raped or worse.

Ohio's Licensed Massage Therapists always keep in mind that any new client may be seeking a different kind of massage than what is legal. We must ensure the safety of our staff and therapists.

S.B. 55 is desperately needed to protect the women who are the victims of Human Trafficking, the public looking for legitimate massage and the many, many Licensed Massage Therapists working diligently to promote massage for non-narcotic pain control. AMTA-OH, which represents the largest contingency of licensed massage therapists in Ohio, asks that you please vote Yes on S.B. 55 to accomplish this goal.

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