



**Representative Susan Manchester**

**Representative Phil Plummer**

Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 81

May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Good afternoon Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 81, which will update and make changes to massage therapy licensing law. This legislation is supported by numerous organizations including the Ohio Township Association, American Massage Therapy Association - Ohio Chapter, and Abolition Ohio.

Currently, Ohio is the only state that requires a license for massage therapy, while also allowing massage to be performed without a license. This is the result of a loophole in Ohio law that House Bill 81 aims to address. The present loophole enables non-licensed individuals to perform massage, as long as they do not call it "massage therapy" or advertise their practices as "medical" or "therapeutic massage". These non-licensed individuals are performing the same techniques as licensed massage therapists, but do not have to meet the educational and safety requirements prescribed by the State Medical Board. House Bill 81's purpose is to close this loophole, ensuring uniform licensure and safety across our state.

Additionally, House Bill 81 will assist with the prevention of human trafficking and prostitution throughout our state. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, illicit massage and spa businesses are the number one venue for sex trafficking in America. Non-licensed individuals have been taking advantage of this licensing loophole to open establishments they refer to as “relaxation massage” or “Asian massage”, which serve as fronts for human trafficking and prostitution. By closing the current licensing loophole, the State Medical Board will finally have the ability to inspect these establishments and ensure they are not being used for illegal activity. House Bill 81 ensures the Board will also be able to refer bad actors and their establishments to local law enforcement, enabling them to root out those who are taking advantage of the massage profession for illegal activities.

This bill also clarifies and modernizes our townships’ ability to regulate massage establishments and gives them the same regulatory authority as cities under Ohio’s “home rule” amendment in our state constitution. House Bill 81 further clarifies that if a township chooses to regulate massage establishments, those regulations must require all practitioners to hold a license through the State Medical Board.

This legislation to revise massage therapy law was previously introduced in the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly as House Bill 374.

House Bill 81’s purpose is to streamline the State Medical Board, law enforcement, and our townships’ abilities to hold bad actors accountable. Ohio has one of the highest human trafficking rates in the country, and the current licensing loophole is furthering the ability of these illegal establishments to take advantage of vulnerable individuals in our communities.

We have been working on an amendment to create a registry at The State Medical Board of Ohio for bodywork professionals who choose not to pursue licensure. Registry applicants must be 18 years old and will submit contact information and identify if they have a professional license in another state or have had a professional license revoked, suspended, or denied. This proposed exemption will allow for unlicensed professionals who are operating a legitimate body work business while providing information for law enforcement to investigate nefarious activity.

Last summer, House Bill 81 unanimously passed the House of Representatives.

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee, Representative Plummer and I thank you for this opportunity to speak on House Bill 81 and we are happy to answer any questions you may have.