



March 26, 2024

Senate Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: Support of HB 1498, Massage Therapy Examiners Board Unauthorized Practice

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards (FSMTB®) is a not-for-profit corporation with membership comprised of massage therapy regulatory boards and agencies in the United States and its territories. **The Maryland State Board of Massage Therapy Examiners is a member of the FSMTB.** The mission of FSMTB is to support its member boards in their work to ensure that the practice of massage therapy is provided to the public safely and competently.

FSMTB supports the passage of HB 1498, Massage Therapy Examiners Unauthorized Practice.

The addition of *prohibiting a person from aiding and abetting the unauthorized practice of massage therapy* in the Maryland Massage Therapy Practice Act would allow the board to take a more **robust approach against human trafficking and illicit business practice in the massage profession.** Adding this to the Massage Practice Act would greatly benefit the Board by allowing them to restrict bad actors from entering into the massage profession based on their affiliation with criminal activity further ensuring the safety and welfare of the public.

The Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards' Human Trafficking Report (<https://www.fsmtb.org/media/1606/httf-report-final-web.pdf>) indicates that human trafficking is prevalent and that its impact on massage therapy is sizable. This is largely because illicit businesses (IBs) use massage therapy as a front for their illegal activity. An analysis of data collected from the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline by Polaris in 2020 ranks the illicit massage business at #3 in the method used for trafficking. <https://polarisproject.org/wp->

<content/uploads/2022/01/Human-Trafficking-Trends-in-2020-by-Polaris.pdf> **Regulators can change the reality.**

Adding aiding and abetting as a violation of the Massage Practice Act will strengthen the Board's ability to combat human trafficking. Many states that regulate massage therapy have adopted this into their statute so their Boards can better protect the safety and welfare of the public. States with weak regulatory frameworks that do not exercise adequate oversight help IB networks move and expand nationally.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring this information forward. Should you have any questions please contact me at ahernandez@fsmtb.org or call (913) 681-0380.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ashley Hernandez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Ashley Hernandez, MPA

Government Relations Specialist