



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY
HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION COMMITTEE**

February 23, 2026

Delegate Heather Bagnall, Chair, House Health Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 975 Health Occupations—Massage Therapy-Advertising

Dear Chairperson Bagnell and members of the House Health Committee,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Human Trafficking Prevention Committee (HTPC), I am writing in strong support of HB 975 Health Occupations—Massage Therapy-Advertising

The mission of the HTPC is to increase understanding of human trafficking and to develop effective strategies for prevention and response. While HB 975 is a straightforward bill, its passage would have significant and far-reaching implications for continuing the professionalization of the massage therapist industry. The bill requires massage therapy ads to clearly list the provider's full name and license or registration number, with limited exceptions. It bans ads that promote or suggest prostitution, escorting, or sexual services, including ads placed on websites known for that content. The bill also requires the State Board of Massage Therapy Examiners to spell out prohibited advertising language and set up a clear process for the public and licensees to report violations.

Illicit massage businesses frequently rely on vague, misleading, or sexually suggestive advertising to mask criminal activity, including labor and sex trafficking. By requiring advertisements to clearly identify the licensed or registered individual providing services—and by prohibiting advertising that references or implies sexual services or appears on websites known for such content—this bill removes a key tool used by traffickers to exploit individuals behind a façade of legitimacy.

Equally important, this legislation reinforces the professionalization of massage therapy. Licensed massage therapists and registered massage practitioners are trained healthcare professionals who adhere to ethical standards and scope-of-practice requirements. Clear advertising rules protect these professionals by distinguishing legitimate, licensed practice from illegal operations that undermine public trust and devalue the profession. Transparency in advertising helps consumers make informed decisions and ensures that legitimate providers are not unfairly associated with criminal enterprises.

The bill's direction to the State Board of Massage Therapy Examiners to define prohibited language and establish reporting procedures further strengthens enforcement while providing clarity and consistency for practitioners and the public alike. This balanced approach supports compliance, accountability, and public safety.



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Montgomery County recently launched the *Look Before You Book* campaign to educate the public about the difference between legally operating and illegal massage and acupuncture businesses. Recent police inspections revealed numerous establishments using sexually suggestive advertising while falsely claiming to employ licensed massage and bodywork professionals.

Passage of HB 975 would put an end to these deceptive practices, strengthening oversight and better protecting the health and safety of both workers and consumers. This bill sends a clear message: massage therapy is a legitimate, regulated profession, and Maryland will not tolerate the misuse of professional credentials to facilitate exploitation. I urge the committee to support its passage.

Sincerely,
Jodi Finkelstein, MSW
Executive Director
Montgomery County Human Trafficking Prevention Committee