

Representative Paul Seaton
House Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 505
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Representative Seaton and members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Ron Gibbs and I am a licensed massage therapist in Alaska and have been practicing in Kodiak for the past 14 years. I currently am a member of Massage Board, but I am writing you in my capacity as an individual therapist to offer my full support to the revised version of HB110.

HB110 is the first revision to the Massage therapy statute since the law took effect in 2015. Some of the changes are minor in nature such as reducing the required hours for Blood borne pathogens for initial licensing. Other changes are more important and vital to our industry.

HB110 will give regulatory authority to the Board of Massage therapy over Massage establishments that are not owned by a currently licensed massage therapist. This revision is a critical piece of legislation in the battle to eliminate the illicit massage businesses which plague our industry. National organizations such as the Polaris Project and The Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards have released extensive reports documenting the scope of the human trafficking problem, ("Human Trafficking in Illicit Massage Businesses. "Human Trafficking Task Force Report"). Human trafficking in Illicit Massage businesses is an organized system of criminal activity that, up to now, has been able to circumvent criminal prosecution. Closing these operations down has proven difficult because without a criminal complaint, authorities are unable to investigate them and when they do, it is the massage practitioner who is arrested while the owner continues to operate with impunity. Presently there are 35 such establishments operating in the Anchorage area (www.rubmaps.com). Both of the national reports identify key characteristics of these establishments and identify regulatory steps that a governing body could implement that would help close down these types of operations. With regulatory authority, the board could determine violations and sanctions. With the passage of the Massage therapy licensing law, Alaska's massage therapists have gained recognition and credibility as a health-care profession. Unfortunately, we are continuing to be plagued by the stigma that is being generated by these illegal establishments.

The issue of federal background checks has been the source of much concern and confusion. Statutes presently require a federal background check at initial and renewal licensing. Unfortunately, the only way to generate a national background check is by submitting new fingerprints each time. This has been an expensive burden for our licensed therapists who live and work in Alaska only. They must travel to a location that performs the finger printing, pay a \$20-\$25 fee, then submit that card with another \$60 fee to the state to process them. Within the past several years, the FBI has introduced a program (referred to as "rap back") which allows them to retain civil fingerprints on file, and to update the submitting requestor on new developments in the subject's criminal history without soliciting additional prints. This requires an authorizing statute by a participating state, and Alaska currently does not have one. Without this statute, we are forced to resubmit fingerprints each time. Some legislators have suggested by not just end the requirement for background checks totally. This is problematic because of the problem I've already discussed related to illicit massage businesses. One of the characteristics of these establishments is that the practitioners are systematically rotated out of state ever few months. According to the FBI, these women are moved from Alaska to Los Angeles, and Chicago. If they are arrested in Chicago, and return to Alaska, without a federal background check, we would never know they had committed a crime that would make them ineligible for license renewal. This has already come up multiple times here and we only have had the licensing for two years. HB110 relieves the burden on our legitimate therapists by only requiring this process once every three renewal cycles (6yrs). Until such time the legislature

chooses to endorse the "Rap –Back" program, this is a fair compromise that relieves the financial burden yet maintains protection of the public.

Other proposed changes such as increasing the required hours of training from 500 to 625 reflect an update to state standards to keep in accordance with national, best practice standards. It does not impact current licensees or any Alaskan school programs (which are all above 700 hrs. currently).

I request your support of these changes by passing HB110.

Respectfully,

Ron Gibbs
License 101414