

DefendDignity

GL5.2

Review of Body Rub Parlour and Holistic Centre By-laws – Consultation and Research Findings

Chair, Vice Chair and members of the General Government
and Licensing Committee

My name is Debbie Pond, I am a member of the national leadership team for Defend Dignity and coordinator of Defend Dignity's Survivor Support Fund.

On behalf of Defend Dignity I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak to the Recommendations that the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards recommends that City Council adopt.

Defend Dignity is a national organization that exists to end all forms of sexual exploitation in Canada. Defend Dignity acts as a catalyst for individuals and churches to end sexual exploitation in Canada. Commercial sexual exploitation includes pornography, strip clubs, escorts, massage parlours, and prostitution. All involve the selling of sexual services which undermine the dignity of women, men and children and detrimental to a healthy society.

This is a formidable and challenging issue in an everchanging environment which requires long term multi-layered solutions.

The following are some of the recommendations that we would submit for your consideration.

A Review of Municipal Licensing and Standards Division's Management of Business Licences Part Two: Licensed Holistic Centres report dated October 24, 2017 from Toronto's auditor general found that ten Professional Holistic Associations were operating on paper only. We believe that by removing the licence requirements for holistic centres and practitioners

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would allow for further exploits by those currently practising within this field. There are still many unknowns if the licence requirements were removed. What would happen to the Holistic Associations, would there be any regulations, what avenues of by-law enforcement would be available for rogue holistic centres, practitioners who would not choose to license under the Body Rub Parlour licensing regulations?

Recommendation

We recommend that Municipal Licensing and Standards remove the accreditation for the ten Professional Holistic Associations that were identified as operating on paper only. We believe that these Holistic Associations should not be allowed to self regulate but the City of Toronto must provide oversight as needed.

We believe that lifting the cap off Body Rub Parlours (aka BRPs) will allow traffickers to have an opportunity for increased trafficking in BRPs while legitimizing the sale of sexual services.

We know that traffickers engage in trafficking in BRPs and Holistic Centres (aka HCs), in the City of Toronto and other cities in the province of Ontario, through first hand information from victims/survivors and new reports relating to trafficking in BRPs in the City of Toronto.

Toronto.com new report dated March 19, 2019

Toronto councillor Jim Karygiannis was quoted:

“Scarborough-Agincourt councillor Jim Karygiannis said his ward is “infested” with spas selling sex, and argued their owners are exploiting women, some of whom are forced into sex work.”

(Source: <https://www.toronto.com/news-story/9219191-stop-racially-profiling-scarborough-spa-workers-advocates-tell-city/>)

Toronto Sun news report November 28, 2017

Det/Sgt. Nunzio Tramontozzi, of the Sex Crimes Unit indicated a female victim was lured from her home in Portugal with the promise of a receptionist job. When she got to Toronto she was told the job was filled. “However, she was told there was another position available working as a masseuse in a massage parlour,” Tramontozzi said, adding the victim was later “coerced into selling sexual services while performing massages” and her passport was taken away. “On Oct. 19, Tramontozzi said officers executed search warrants at three massage parlours in the city

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and seized documents that allegedly included the victim's passport."

(Source: <https://torontosun.com/news/local-news/betrayal-leads-to-human-trafficking-arrests>)

A Review of Municipal Licensing and Standards Division's Management of Business Licences Part Two: Licensed Holistic Centres report dated October 24, 2017 from Toronto's auditor general found that more than a quarter of the 410 holistic centres appear to advertise erotic massages and other services that may violate city bylaws.

"We recognize that there are many legitimate licensed holistic centres and practitioners. However, for those providing unauthorized services, aside from potentially being a violation to the City's licensing and zoning bylaws, these centres could potentially pose an array of health, safety and community issues, including the risk of human trafficking." (page 3 Executive Summary)

Women working in these establishments are often coerced to provide services that they did not agree to but feel that they have no option but to comply. Many of the attendants are Chinese and do not speak English which create language barriers. The language is a barrier to women not understanding what is being asked of them; "to provide extras" or if in fact these "extra services" are legal or not in Canada. The women are often fined for violating a myriad of unpredictable rules that change frequently. The women are fined by the owners/mangers of the BRPs and HCs for not complying and coerce them into providing services they did not want to do.

We do not support the modernizing of the requirements of the Body Rub Parlour By-Law by removing the cap on the number of body rub parlours permitted in the City of Toronto.

Recommendation

We recommend that the cap on Body Rub Parlours be held at 25.

We believe increasing safety requirements in the Body Rub Parlour By-law is paramount to the safety of the women working in the BRPs.

It is widely known that historically organized crime has been involved in the operate and control of BRPs and there is no reason to believe that organized crime has relinquished its control over their BRPs.

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Criminal Intelligence Service Canada - Strategic Intelligence Brief

“A number of the organized crime networks assessed, some that have been involved in the illicit sex trade for decades, have evolved from individuals involved in street-level pimping (characteristic of the mid-90s) to well-organized networks that have shifted toward less visible environments, such as strip bars, massage parlours, hotel/motels, the Internet, and private residences.”

(Source: https://www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/imce_uploads/DISCOVER/OUR%20WORK/CHILD%20SURVIVAL/sib_web_en.pdf)

New Report by Rattan Mall – The Voice - Voiceonline.com February 16, 2018

“The Toronto Star reported this week that there were fire attacks on a tattoo parlour owned by a Hells Angel from the Woodbridge chapter, and a massage parlour owned by a senior Hells Angel in London, Ontario.”

(Source: <https://www.voiceonline.com/ontario-spillover-effect/>)

We support the general updates to the BRPs By-Law to bolster health and safety requirements for BRPs, including requirement that BRP managers are licensed and undergo criminal records checks.

Recommendations

We recommend that owners and/or companies that are registered owners of the BRPS and HC should undergo background criminal record checks as well as managers.

We recommend that owners/managers of BRPS and HC, when seeking applications for licensing, be trained to recognize the signs of human trafficking, know and refer victims to service supports within the community and what actions they should take.

We recommend that the City of Toronto address “demand” by having owners/managers make available information to client in BRPs and HCs relating to current laws regarding buying sex (buying sex is crime), sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Anecdotal information from women working in the BRPs and HCs indicate that they experience choking, name calling and violence from clientele of the BRPs. There are many Chinese women working in the BRPS and HC who are living without status in Canada. These women as well experience sexual assault, violence and threats within their work environment but fear

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reporting these matters to authorities as they believe they will be deported to their home country. This increases the women's vulnerability to being trafficked and/or exploited.

Recommendations

We recommend that by-law officers be trained in using a client-centred trauma-informed approach when they encounter women within the BRPs and HCs. They should be trained to recognize signs of human trafficking, be familiar with social service supports and seek to ensure the safety of the women when speaking with them on any issues. The by-law officers when entering BRPs and HCs where there are women who do not speak English should have with them a frontline worker from a community agency who speaks the language and provides information on service supports in the community.

We recommend that City by-law officers and police continue to seek opportunities to build trusting relationships with the women in the BRPs and HCs so that they will feel safe and report abuses. The women need to understand that the City of Toronto is a Sanctuary City, what that means for those women working and living without status in Canada.

The City of Toronto needs to proactively tackle the issue of human trafficking in both licensed and unlicensed businesses in the City. We believe that educating frontline City staff is paramount so that information can be shared in a timely manner with those applicants seeking a body rub license as an attendant.

Recommendations

We recommend that the City of Toronto employees be trained on the signs of human trafficking and social support services and basic human rights of individuals as they encounter those seeking applications for licensing. A package of similar information including their basic human rights within Canada should be provided to applicants. This package of information should be available in Mandarin, Cantonese and French and any other common language that the applicants may speak if not able to converse/understand English.

We recommend that the human trafficking hotline number be added to the license for each applicant so that she can access that number as needed for seeking information, asking question or reporting any incidents.

A young woman currently working in three Toronto BRPs indicated that she wished that there could be social workers and alternative employment opportunities made available to the

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women when they come into the City office and apply for licenses. Other women have indicated they would leave BRPs if they have viable alternative employment.

We recommend that the City of Toronto should seek opportunities to develop exit strategies and provide information regarding other employment training or deferral alternative for women applying for body rubber licenses at the time of application. The diversion of licensing fees could provide employment supports, education grants and support services.

We look forward to staff report in the fourth quarter of 2019 with further analysis and final recommendations on modernizing the BRP licence category, reviewing the cap on the number of BRPs and re-evaluating the need for holistic licensing.

Submitted for your review and consideration.

Debbie Pond
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