

**FACULTY OF  
LIBERAL ARTS &  
PROFESSIONAL  
STUDIES**

**Department of  
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To: The City of Toronto's General Government and Licensing Committee

Re: Review of Body Rub Parlour and Holistic Centre By-laws

May 21, 2019

The following petition is in response to the recent recommendations coming out of the Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) consultations concerning the proposed reform of the Holistic Centres and Body-Rub Parlours Licensing By-Laws (Chapter 545).

The recommendations following the MLS consultations that are up for discussion include:

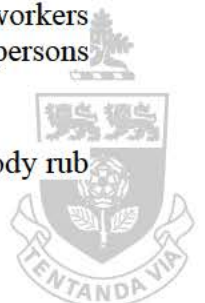
- a) Removal of the license requirements for holistic practitioners and centres;
- b) Modernizing the licensing requirements of the Body-Rub Parlour By-Law, including increasing or removing the cap on the number of body rub parlours permitted in the City of Toronto; and
- c) Increasing safety requirements in the Body-Rub Parlour By-law.

It is vital that we foreground the importance of the views and perspectives of holistic practitioners and body-rub workers in any by-law changes. In accordance with consultations involving directors and members of the Holistic Practitioners Alliance, and other allied workers' rights organizations, we, as academics and researchers in various related fields, wish to express our support of im/migrant workers in this sector.

The Committee must ensure that racialized and im/migrant worker communities are able to work in safety and with dignity, free of unnecessary and unwanted police and state intervention. People who offer holistic, therapeutic, body-rub and massage services need to be able to do so legally, and should have more opportunities to work, not fewer.

This petition is about protecting holistic workers and their families from xenophobic, anti-migrant, and anti-trafficking policies. There is a realistic fear of even more harassment due to anti-trafficking policies if the license is removed. While holistic workers and their allied groups support further research and investigation into real incidents of human trafficking, it is important to counter the assumption that Asian and im/migrant women in holistic and body-rub centres are being forced into sex work. It is also important to note that the majority of workers in this industry are mature women with agency who are not trafficked persons forced to perform erotic labour.

The continued conflation of trafficking with not only holistic centres and body rub

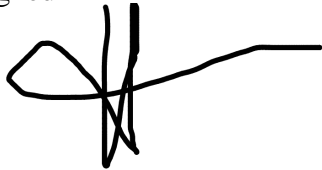


parlours, but also with Asian and im/migrant women who provide holistic massage services, exposes these workers to unauthorized police interrogations, threats of deportation, and the potential loss of legal immigrant status. Law enforcement routinely uses anti-trafficking legislation to perform unlawful searches of businesses, harass and assault Asian and migrant workers who are not fluent in English, and discourage practitioners from seeking recourse against these violations for fear of further scrutiny and violence.

Stronger efforts must be made to ensure that law enforcement activities within this sector do not exacerbate moral panic around trafficking and sex work, conflate trafficking with holistic services and body-rub work or contribute to the discrimination faced by vulnerable workers in these industries. Any future communication and interactions with holistic practitioners and owners should be conducted with their safety and dignity in mind. The issues presented during this by-law review reinforce that this is part of a larger conversation around justice, race, and marginalization.

While we are aware that research shows that licensing in these sectors often increases stigma, discrimination, and undue police involvement, we are committed to working with these communities to address these problems/injustices. This is a matter of labour rights, workers' rights, and public health. Holistic and body-rub workers deserve access to safe workspaces, free from police abuse of authority and unnecessary interventions.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kamala Kempadoo', with a stylized, looped structure and a long horizontal tail extending to the right.

Kamala Kempadoo, PhD, Professor, York University

Emily van der Meulen, PhD, Associate Professor, Ryerson University

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