



## **Deputation by Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network)**

Good morning / afternoon,

I am Elene Lam, the Executive Director of Butterfly, the Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network. I have been working on issues of human rights, violence against women, and the rights of sex workers and migrants for more than 20 years. Butterfly is organized by and supports workers in holistic centres, body rub parlours and the sex industry in Toronto.

We are here because these policies change will affect the livelihood, labour rights and working conditions of more than 2500 workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours. More than 90% of workers in holistic centres are immigrant Asian women over 35 years old who need their jobs to survive, to support themselves and their families. As an immigrant Asian Women with limited English skills, it is not easy to find a decent job in Toronto. Work in holistic centres is an important source of income for many in our communities.

Butterfly did outreach with more than 500 of these workers every year, and they told us that they are neither traffickers or trafficked victims. They told us that they want their safety, labour and employment rights protected. They do not want to continue to face harassment and discrimination through bylaw enforcement. Shutting down the businesses that employ them, or implementing repressive bylaws would not protect the community. It would create precarious working conditions and increase workers' vulnerability to violence and exploitation.

I would like to share a quote with you from a worker:

"I am 55 years old. I use my own hand to support myself and family. The city should respect our contribution and support us. They should not see us as a problem or enemy."

Another worker said:

"I don't know English and have no education. I don't have any qualifications. Where can I find another job and who will hire me? "

A small number of workers offer body rub services in holistic centres because they are not able to work in the body rub parlours for various reasons, including stigma and discrimination, immigration restrictions, over-regulation of the business, and excessively expensive licensing fees. Some of them prefer to work in a holistic centre as they found it is less isolated and they feel it is more safe than other indoor work.

Butterfly and our allies participated in the recent consultations on holistic centres and body rub parlours. We support the staff recommendation to conduct further studies about the impact of the proposed changes, as some of these proposals were not consulted on during the recent round. These include removing the holistic license, removing the cap on the number of body rub parlour licences; removing requirement of medical examinations; allow body rubbers to work in any body rub parlours, are some of the changes that we need to speak further on. There are a lot of other barriers that prevent workers from working in body rub parlours , such as zoning restrictions, over-regulation, immigration restrictions, and stigma and discrimination. The city should listen to the workers to ensure that bylaws make decent work accessible and that they protect the labour rights of workers.

Workers in holistic centres, body rub parlours and the sex industry are residents of Toronto who live, work and contribute to our society and vote for you. During last year's Chinatown Festival, more than 400 Toronto residents expressed their support for workers in just two days. The workers are residents of Toronto who need to be respected and protected.

More than **2500** families will be affected by this policy change. I urge you as Committee members to support bylaws which have labour rights as their guiding principle and to consult workers in order to determine the best possible changes to policies.

Today we are proposing a few small but critical changes to the recommendations that staff has presented to you which you should have in front of you in writing. Please see the last page of my written submissions where we have put in bold our proposals.

We are asking the Committee to include labour rights as a guiding principle in the regulation of holistic centre and body rub parlours. The bylaws and policies, and the enforcement of them, should ensure the labour rights, health, safety and well-being of workers.

The review of the bylaws also needs to ensure decent work and employment for 2200 workers in holistic centres. Many of the workers are worried that they will lose their jobs licenses are removed or if drastic changes are made to the bylaws. We urge the Committee to ensure that any change of these bylaws be guided by workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours and in direct consultations with us.

Thank you for your time.

Elene Lam

Executive Director

Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network)

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## Appendix

Butterfly, and our allies, support the following amendments (**bolded**) to recommendations made by the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing

1. City Council adopt the following principles for regulating the body rub **and holistic centre** industry
  - A. Ensuring the **labour rights**, health, safety, and well-being of persons;
  - B. Consumer **and worker** protection: and
  - C. Ensuring the general well-being of the City of Toronto, including mitigating community impacts.
  
1. City Council direct the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards, to report to the General Government and Licensing Committee in the fourth quarter of 2019 with proposed amendments to the Body Rub Parlour and Holistic Centre By-laws that are informed by the principles in Recommendation 1 and include an analysis of the feasibility and impacts of:
  - A. Removing the licence requirements for holistic centres and practitioners **in consultation with holistic centres and practitioners;**
  - B. Modernizing the 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 **in consultation with holistic centres and practitioners, and body rub parlours and body rubbers;** and
  - C. Increasing safety requirements **for workers** in the Body Rub Parlour By-law.