

New Controls for Massage Establishments: Fact Sheet

Introduced by Supervisor Carmen Chu, this legislation would combat sex trafficking and exploitation of girls and women by limiting the ability of massage parlors to operate as brothels.



San Francisco Women's Political

601 Van Ness Avenue
P.O. Box E512
San Francisco, CA 94102
sfwpc@sfwpc.org
www.sfwpc.org

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Supervisor Carmen Chu is leading the effort to curb sex trafficking and the exploitation of girls and women by introducing legislation to help police and the Department of Public Health (DPH) close brothels masked as massage parlors. Several organizations, including the San Francisco Women's Political Committee (SFWPC), the largest women's organization in San Francisco, strongly supports Supervisor Chu's legislation.

Problem

San Francisco is a major U.S. hub for sex trafficking. Girls and young women are brought to San Francisco with the promise of work and opportunities in America. These girls and women are then forced into prostitution at massage parlors and health clubs or salons throughout the city and Bay Area. Although San Francisco officials have been outraged over the blatant use of some salons and massage parlors as brothels, they have limited legal remedies to close the parlors. DPH officials are unable to revoke parlors' licenses once they've been issued, nor do they have any jurisdiction to investigate prostitution. And even if massage parlors are found to be operating as brothels, that finding alone has not been legal grounds to revoke their licenses or shut them down.

Solution

This legislation, introduced by Supervisor Carmen Chu, would give departments the ability to work together; Police, Planning, and DPH would be able to utilize each others' resources. The legislation would do the following:

- Allow DPH officials to use police reports as a basis for suspending or revoking a massage parlor's license.
- Require that notice be given to neighborhoods when a salon, massage parlor, or other health club requests a license to add massage work.
- Change permit requirements for such establishments from permitted use to conditional use, which allows for public hearings to determine the effects of the business on the environment.
- Add administrative fees and criminal penalties for violating the health code.

This legislation introduced by Supervisor Carmen Chu is a vital step in reducing the exploitation of girls and women trafficked to the U.S. under false pretenses. It also closes a loophole that has historically allowed massage parlors, salons, and health clubs to operate as brothels.

SFWPC strongly supports this legislation. To get involved, contact SFWPC Policy Chair, Shakari Byerly, at shakari@sfwpc.org.