



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

## Board of Massage Therapists

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March 25, 2025

Chair Jason Kropf  
Members of the House Judiciary Committee  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

re: HB3819

Greetings Chair Kropf, Vice Chair Chotzen, Vice Chair Wallan and committee members,

My name is Robert Ruark; I have been serving as the Executive Director of the Oregon Board of Massage Therapists (OBMT) for just over twelve years. The Oregon Board of Massage Therapists is the agency responsible for the regulation and monitoring the practice of massage therapy in Oregon. Our mission is to ensure public safety by developing, implementing, and maintaining the standards of professional conduct and practice.

Over the past 5 to 10 years, we have observed the introduction and growth of the illicit massage industry in Oregon. These illicit massage businesses (IMBs) do not employ legitimate, licensed massage therapists. According to The Network, a non-profit counter-human trafficking organization that has been analyzing the problem since 2016, "The illicit massage industry is one of the largest and most networked sex trafficking markets in the United States". Demand studies conducted by The Network indicate these illicit storefronts have an annual revenue of \$277,000 to \$1.2 million per storefront. In 2019, Oregon had approximately 63 known IMBs. This number has grown to an estimated 301 IMBs in 2025, showing a compounded annual growth rate of nearly 30%, and an overall, simple growth rate of 377.78%.

In 2023, citing its primary role of public safety, the Board elected to take a lead role in supporting anti-trafficking efforts, both in general and specifically related to the massage industry. The board published a letter of support of the disruption of IMBs and pledged to support other agencies and non-profits working to eliminate the illicit networks that promote and support this illegal activity.

Since then, the Board has implemented several programs, including a landlord engagement program, a local ordinance information program, and training and support for local governments to address IMBs in their communities. OBMT's landlord engagement program strives to educate and inform landlords about the IMBs and how they operate, sharing our licensure information with landlords to help them make informed decisions about leasing commercial properties to possible illicit store fronts. The board's local ordinance program works to support local communities in the development of local ordinances that have been proven to be effective in the elimination of IMBs in our communities while not interfering with the legitimate massage professionals we serve. The board's staff regularly educate and participate on taskforces across the state, offering insight and experience to all

communities and groups that are working to help address the problems of human and sex trafficking across all of Oregon.

OBMT recognizes that the board cannot resolve this problem alone. Addressing this problem will require a multi-agency approach that includes State and local governments, community service providers (Safety Compass, Polaris Project and others), landlords, the criminal justice system, and public support. These entities will have to act together to educate, inform and enforce, with a victim-centric approach, and design effective efforts to reduce and eliminate IMBs.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information about the growing issue of trafficking in Oregon's massage industry and for your efforts to address this issue with HB3819.

Sincerely,

**Robert Ruark**  
Executive Director  
Oregon Board of Massage Therapy