

March 16, 2012

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB-5455**

Thank you, Representative Gentile and Senator Cassano and all of the members of the Planning and Development committee for allowing me to speak in support of House Bill 5455, An Act Concerning Penalties for and the Investigation of the Operation of Illegal Massage Establishments.

To allow businesses which advertise themselves as legitimate massage parlors when everyone, including teenagers, know that they are, in fact, the sex businesses undermines respect for the law. These businesses operate in the open, flaunting either the law itself and/or showing that there are ways to find loopholes in the laws to operate an illegal activity. Others have testified how these businesses degrade our communities and depress our property values and I agree that both of these arguments are valid. As a political science professor I am aware of the data that indicates the degree of mistrust of the government that exists with the public. Studies have shown that nothing breeds this mistrust more than when the public believes some are above the law. These sex businesses scream to the public that the government is turning a blind to prostitution and many believe possibly forcing women to work in these establishments against their will.

HB5455 is not a perfect bill. I have concern that it can be evaded by calling the business by some name that does not violate the letter of the law. The bill, however, is an excellent first step in that gives authorities a clear weapon to penalize these establishments. The penalty is appropriate to the offense and no legitimate massage therapist could object to this bill.

While we must always be wary of over legislating personal behavior I urge the passage of HB5455 because this is an area where the good of the community so outweighs as Justice Brandeis said, "The right to be left alone".

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