

From: [Michael Horowitz](#)
To: [All Alders](#)
Subject: Proposed Ordinance #93243
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Dear Alderpersons,

I am writing as a constituent to express my strong opposition to the proposed ordinance that would require massage establishments to employ licensed massage therapists. While I appreciate the Council's intent to address unlicensed operations, I believe this proposal is misguided in its approach and would cause significant harm to our community. I urge you to vote against it.

It targets skilled practitioners whose expertise falls outside the Western licensing framework. Many bodywork practitioners operating in Madison are highly trained in traditional Eastern modalities, such as Thai massage, Tui Na, Ayurvedic bodywork, shiatsu, and others. These practices have been refined over centuries and are not reflected in Wisconsin's massage therapy curriculum or licensure exam. Requiring a Wisconsin massage therapist license as the standard of legitimacy dismisses these traditions and the communities that practice them. This disproportionately affects immigrant-owned small businesses and practitioners from cultural backgrounds where these techniques are a living tradition, not a credential to be earned from a Western licensing board.

It eliminates affordable options for working-class residents. Licensure requirements drive up costs. Establishments that currently offer accessible, low-cost bodywork are often the only option for middle- and lower-income residents seeking relief from chronic pain, physical labor strain, or stress. This ordinance would force them to close or raise prices dramatically to cover compliance costs. The result is that therapeutic bodywork becomes a luxury available only to those who can afford licensed spa rates. Council should be expanding access to wellness, not restricting it.

It represents government overreach that will cost jobs. This ordinance would shutter operating businesses and eliminate jobs, many of which are held by workers with limited alternative employment options. The drafter's own analysis acknowledges that Wisconsin does not regulate massage establishments at the state level. The City would be going further than the state sees fit, imposing a local licensing regime that the Legislature has not deemed necessary. That should give us pause.

The stated goal can be achieved through less restrictive means. If the Council's genuine concern is public safety, there are targeted, narrowly tailored tools to address those harms directly. Unsanitary conditions, exploitation, and trafficking can be addressed through zoning regulations, health and safety inspections, coordination with law enforcement on trafficking investigations, and complaint-driven enforcement. Requiring licensed massage therapists does not meaningfully address any of those concerns and instead sweeps up legitimate, safe, and valuable businesses in the process.

Licensure is not a reliable proxy for quality or safety. A Wisconsin massage therapy license indicates that someone passed a particular exam and completed a particular curriculum. It does not guarantee competence, and its absence does not indicate danger. Many of the most effective and sought-after bodywork practitioners in our city would be unable or unwilling to pursue a credential that does not reflect their training tradition. We should not conflate regulation with safety.

I urge you to oppose this ordinance and instead work with stakeholders, including immigrant business owners, bodywork practitioners, and public health experts. Working together, I hope that you craft a narrowly targeted approach that addresses legitimate safety concerns without eliminating a diverse, affordable, and valued sector of our community's wellness economy.

Thank you for your time and service to our district.

Respectfully,
Michael Horowitz