



## The League of Women Voters of Delaware Supports Legislation to ELIMINATE HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN DELAWARE

*The League of Women Voters opposes all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking. We consider human trafficking to be a form of modern day slavery and believe that every measure should be taken and every effort should be made through legislation and changes in public policy to prevent human trafficking. Prosecution and penalization of traffickers and abusers should be established, and existing laws should be strictly enforced. Extensive essential services for victims should be applied where needed. Education and awareness programs on human trafficking should be established in our communities and in our schools.*

The following is reported on the National Human Trafficking Hotline<sup>1</sup>:

Fake massage businesses operate as commercial front brothels claiming to offer legitimate services such as massage, acupuncture, and other therapeutic, health, and spa services, but in fact offer commercial sex to customers. Women in brothels disguised as massage businesses typically live on-site where they are coerced into providing commercial sex to 6 to 10 men a day, 7 days a week. Fake massage businesses frequently operate in strip malls, office buildings, and sometimes, residential homes, in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the United States, including in Delaware.

An individual under the age of 18 engaged in commercial sex is considered a victim of sex trafficking regardless of the presence of force, fraud or coercion.

**Status of human trafficking in Delaware.** As recently as 2014, the Polaris Project, the leading legislative advocacy organization on behalf of battling human trafficking, ranked Delaware among the 7 least effective states in combating trafficking. That status improved somewhat when SB 197 was signed by the Governor on June 30, 2014; however, the lack of any funding for implementation has hampered its effectiveness. Based on the Uniform Act on Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking (UAPRHT), SB 197 established the three-pronged approach that law enforcement and victims' advocates consider essential:

1. Prevent and penalize the criminal conduct—trafficking, forced labor, and sexual servitude—at the core of human trafficking.
2. Provides essential protections for human trafficking victims.
3. Promotes partnerships in the fight against human trafficking, public awareness, and development of coordinated victim services.

In spite of the lack of funding, a Council was established and its two major committees – Public Awareness and Victim Services – have actively worked to carry out many of the Act's provisions with the aid of numerous active volunteers.

**HB 35.** In January 2017, Rep. Bryon Short introduced HB 35. If enacted, it would define "massage establishment," and authorize the Board of Massage and Bodywork to grant or deny licensure of such establishments and adopt regulations pertaining to the licensure, maintenance and standards to be applied to such establishments. The Division of Professional Regulation would be authorized to inspect such establishments without notice or concurrent criminal investigation and impose criminal and civil penalties for the unlicensed practice of massage and bodywork and the operation of an unlicensed massage establishment. The bill has several sponsors and co-sponsors from both parties

**LWVDE urges enactment of HB 35 with sufficient funding for the Professional Regulation Division of the Department of State to implement it.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sex-trafficking-venuesindustries/fake-massage-businesses>