



# SAFETY FOR ALL RESPECT FOR ALL

Protecting the Safety of Workers in Holistic  
Centres and Body Rub Parlours by Allowing  
Them to Lock Their Doors

Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network)

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# TORONTO BYLAWS ARE ENDANGERING THE SAFETY OF WORKERS IN HOLISTIC CENTRES AND BODY RUB PARLOURS

- ▶ Toronto Bylaws 545-177(I) and 545-343 directly undermine workers' safety by forbidding owners and workers (with certain exceptions) from locking their doors or even installing a locking device of any kind to individual rooms and cubicles.
- ▶ Bylaw 545-343 states that no one may perform a body rub or provide any other service in a room with a door, or other means of access, that's equipped with a locking device.

- ▶ These repressive bylaws violate workers' rights and constitute a direct physical danger to them. From June 2019 to June 2020, more than 60 workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours reported being robbed. One worker was murdered in February. [1]

“I was working with two other workers and providing services to three customers when we were robbed. A mother had brought her daughter and daughter's friend into our spa for a massage. One of them was only 16 years old. The robber took out a knife and forced us to give him money. All of us were so afraid.”

- Julia

- ▶ Over half of the workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours have experienced different kinds of violence including robbery, theft, assault, sexual assault and harassment. Workers are worried about their safety as well as being fined.

“A white guy came in and started chocking me with his hands. He hit my head against the wall. I was really afraid. I gave him what I had earned on that day.”

- Nana

[1] Ashley Noell Arzaga, 24, was murdered with a machete at the Crown Spa on Dufferin Street near Wilson Avenue. According to Toronto Police, she was allegedly attacked by a 17-year-old male who also injured another woman at the spa. (Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/homicide-toronto-massaga-parlour-teen-boy-charged-woman-dead-1.5475671>)



“This is not an easy job. We have to deal with a lot of issues at work. My friend was robbed at gunpoint by a group of gang members. They took all her money and they even took her credit card machine. I have told my daughter that if I ever called her for help, it would put us both in danger because they might find her or threaten her for more money.”

- Ting

“I was robbed by a man. He pointed his gun at my head. I thought I would die. It was so scary. I was traumatized and I got injured after that. I could not work anymore. I have no job and no income now.”

- Anna

## HOW DO THE BYLAWS INCREASE THE RISK OF VIOLENCE?

- ▶ Toronto City’s zoning regulations “effectively zone the sanctioned body rub parlours into unlit, underpopulated, and ultimately unsafe areas of the city.” [2]
- ▶ Locking the door is an important safety measure for the workers to screen clients and protect their safety. However, the Toronto City bylaws prohibit the workers from locking their doors or risk being charged or fined.
- ▶ Workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours in Toronto have highlighted to City Council the problem of increased risk of violence against them for many years, but their concerns have repeatedly been ignored.

“If massage practitioners like us cannot quickly open the door within three seconds, or if there is any other delay of five seconds in responding to orders, we will get a ticket for not opening the door.”

- Julia

# HOW CAN LOCKING THE DOOR PROTECT THE WORKERS?

“I have to choose between being robbed/assaulted or being charged and fined. I don't know why I have to be punished when I just want to protect my safety.”

- Julia

- ▶ Locking doors is an important safety measure for workers to screen their clients and prevent violence.

“I can see what happens outside and I would not open the door if there is something wrong.”

- Nana

“I locked the door even I may be charged, because I still need to have my life to raise my children. I recognized the robber from a picture shared by other works. He was not able to come in and he left”

- Emi

- ▶ Over 150 workers and 500 supporters have signed the petition to urge the city to stop charging the workers when they lock the door to protect themselves.

**Stop Enforcing These Bylaws That Prohibit Workers from Locking Their Doors!**

# WHAT OTHER PROBLEMS ARE WORKERS IN HOLISTIC CENTRES AND BODY RUB PARLOURS FACING?

## Racial Profiling, Overpolicing, Excessive Inspection and Prosecution

- ▶ Holistic practitioners and body rubbers have been increasingly targeted over recent years with excessive, unnecessary and discriminatory inspections and prosecutions.

“Why do they need to come here so often. I was investigated three times between January and March. It is not necessary”

- ▶ According to data obtained through freedom of information requests, from 2013 to 2016, the number of Municipal Licensing and Standards visits to holistic centres increased by 212% while visits to individual holistic practitioners increased by 323%.
- ▶ In the survey on Toronto Holistic Practitioners’ Experiences (2018), Butterfly found that a majority of the respondents worry about inspections or raids from police and other authorities and being fined or charged.

“Not only me, the client also does not like the bylaw. We had to stop our session due to being interrogate by the bylaw officers. It is a disturbance and harassment of our business. The clients were angry and left without payment. They will never come back! Will the city compensate my loss?”

- ▶ **Toronto City bylaw has formed a team with nine full-time bylaw enforcement officers to specifically target 400 holistic centres and body rub parlours, where the majority of workers are Asians and other racialized people. This leads to them being harassed and charged, and disrupts their businesses and their neighbours.**

**“The bylaw officers acted like gangsters. They were so rude and searched everywhere. They flipped the towel of the massage bed and made like a mess. I was treated like a criminal.”**

- ▶ **Hence, the overpolicing, punishment, and ticketing induces fear of law enforcement, preventing workers from seeking help and protection when they experience violence or threats.**

**“Four police officers and bylaw officers came together. They were extremely violent and rude. They ordered us to face the wall and we were not allowed to talk. They treated me like a criminal as they searched my place, including all the drawers, wallets – even my underwear – without a warrant. They left the room in a mess.”**

## WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE?

Over 500 workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours and their allies have expressed their concern to the City of Toronto on the bylaws surrounding door locking.

On August 28, 2020, the Director of Municipal Licensing and Standards Carleton Grant announced the moratorium on this bylaw's enforcement. This is a crucial win for these workers' safety, and we still need to continue to fight to end racial profiling, excessive investigations of bylaw enforcement, and change the repressive bylaws used against workers.

**We demand the City of Toronto to:**

- ▶ Stop excessive investigations of holistic centres and body rub parlours based on racial profiling. The city should defund the bylaw enforcement officers.
- ▶ Repeal funding for the nine full-time bylaw enforcement officers who are tasked with targeting body rub parlours and holistic centres. Funding should instead be allocated to programs proven to enhance community safety and improve labour conditions.
- ▶ Remove the bylaw provisions that prohibit workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours from locking their door.
- ▶ Immediately stop repressive policies against holistic centres and body rub parlours.
- ▶ Respect and listen to the workers in holistic centres and body rub parlours, and stop discriminating against them.
- ▶ Ensure that a comprehensive review of current bylaws and policies for holistic centres and body rub parlours is conducted, with the meaningful participation of owners, practitioners, and other stakeholders in holistic centres and body-rub parlours.



## WHO IS BUTTERFLY?

Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network) is a grassroots organization formed by sex workers, workers in massage parlours, social workers, legal and health professionals and founded upon the belief that migrant and sex workers are entitled to respect for their human rights, regardless of their immigration status. Asian and migrant sex workers are self-organized to fight for justice and dignity.

Butterfly is a member of Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, Migrant Rights Network and Migrant Workers Alliance for Change.



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