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Selling Sex in Honolulu: Unlicensed Massage Parlors Lack Enforcement Scrutiny

By Robert Brown | 11/23/2010

Editor's Note: This article is part of Civil Beat's ongoing coverage of prostitution and human trafficking in Honolulu. Read our related coverage:

- [Selling Sex in Honolulu: Police Focus Prostitution Arrests on Women, Not Men](#)
- [Selling Sex in Honolulu: Prostitution Busts for Men Turn Up Mostly Locals, Few Tourists](#)



Rj Brown - Civil Beat

At least eight massage parlors in Honolulu have no record of a license to practice, as is required by law, Civil Beat has found.

Civil Beat looked into the licensing of massage parlors because law enforcement officials say the establishments are sometimes used as fronts for prostitution and can be linked to [human trafficking](#).

In our investigation, we went through the phone book and performed Google searches for "Massage Honolulu," "Full body massage Honolulu," "Oriental massage Honolulu," to find establishments.

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A search of the Hawaii Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs's website showed that all of the massage parlors we found in the phone book were registered and up-to-date. Those parlors included: Siam Thai Massage, Massage Thailand, China Mary Rose, Ohana Massage, Thai Hawaiian Massage, Stay in Touch and Therapeutic Massage Center, all of which were licensed through 2012.

The Google results, on the other hand, were not so positive.

A cursory search performed over a few hours turned up eight businesses that were not listed in the [Professional and Vocational Licensing registry](#).

Under Hawaii law, local businesses must [register](#) with the DCCA's [Business Registration Division](#). The exceptions include sole proprietors, charitable organizations and unincorporated associations.

But even if they qualify for an exception, every massage establishment, business or sole proprietor has to get a [vocational license](#) with the Board of Massage Therapy, a separate arm of the DCCA.

If they fail to do so, they are operating without a license.

But the law isn't enforced unless a complaint is filed against a business, said Jo Ann Uchida, a complaints and enforcement officer with the DCCA.

In fiscal year 2010, the detection and enforcement wing of the DCCA issued 25 citations and six judgments against businesses that operated without a license.

"We get reports, usually from other licensees but also from consumers that suggest that there might be some activity that requires a license," said Uchida.

Once a complaint is received, an investigator gathers information on the alleged unlicensed activity. If the office can prove that the business is operating illegally, it then issues citations or judgments.

If cited, businesses are supposed to close until they get a license. The state also issues fines, which vary.

Hawaii Revised Statute [436B-26.5](#) says that penalties for first violations must not exceed \$500. The fee is up to \$1000 for the second and \$5000 for three or more offenses.

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If the business challenges the citation, it goes to an administrative hearing, where the court can issue a judgment compelling the business to register or pay fines.

Uchida told Civil Beat if the office receives multiple reports regarding the same, or similar location, the office will periodically initiate stings, occasionally with the help of police.

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Some, like Mai Thai Massage (advertised below) were licensed.

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Its license expires June 30, 2012.

But in a single afternoon, we found several other establishments that didn't have licenses: Pearl City Relaxation, Rosemarri, Rappongi Relaxation, Pine Tree Spa, Tokyo Relaxation, VIP Relaxation, King Spa and Oriental Relaxation.

We called each establishment to make sure that these were real businesses, not out-of-date listings on Google. We verified that they identified themselves by their advertised names and confirmed that they performed massage services.

