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SANTA BARBARA, CA — A report published by the Erotic Service Providers Legal, Educational, and Research Project (ESPLER Project) reveals that proposed Santa Barbara city regulations targeting local massage establishments lack factual evidence of sex trafficking. Titled *The Local Machinery of a National War on Asian Massage Workers: A Santa Barbara Case Study*, the investigation analyzed over a decade of public records, finding zero documented prostitution or sex trafficking arrests connected to local massage businesses. Despite this lack of evidence, local law enforcement is seeking expanded authority to conduct up to six unannounced, warrantless inspections per year and mandate private organization credentialing.

The report links Santa Barbara's draft ordinance to a national enforcement campaign promoted by groups like the California Massage Therapy Council (CAMTC) and The Network, which utilize licensing restrictions and administrative disruption to target Asian-owned massage businesses without establishing evidence of criminal exploitation. Furthermore, ESPLER Project's review of a $950,000 federal anti-trafficking grant awarded to Santa Barbara County found that public funds were heavily funneled into administrative coordination, program evaluation, and task force meetings rather than direct worker aid, such as emergency shelter or housing assistance.

Organizing under the campaign **Rights Not Rescue**, local massage therapists and advocates warn that the ordinance will strip experienced practitioners of their livelihoods while driving workers away from calling law enforcement when real safety threats arise. Studies cited in the report demonstrate that intrusive police inspections heighten worker fear and economic vulnerability rather than preventing harm. In light of these findings, ESPLER Project urges Santa Barbara lawmakers to reject the proposed ordinance and instead invest in confidential reporting mechanisms, labor protections, and worker-led support initiatives.

Link to report https://esplerp.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Santa-Barbara-Case-Study.pdf

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