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NEWS CHICAGO CRIME

Ald. O'Shea seeks to rub out massage parlor abuses

By Fran Spielman | May 23, 2017, 9:18pm CDT

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A Southwest Side alderman wants to make it more difficult for “pimps” to profit from the world’s oldest profession from behind the legitimate veil of a massage parlor.

“The goal here is to turn the table on the cowards that operate these types of places and victimize the most vulnerable segment of our communities,” said Ald. Matt O’Shea (19th).

“Oftentimes, individuals working in these parlors were forced into this. They are victims of human trafficking. These types of businesses operate a storefront taking advantage of young girls or people who aren’t strong enough to stand up for themselves. We have always gone after the women when, in fact, we should be going after the people organizing this—the pimps if you will.”

The ordinance that O’Shea plans to introduce at Wednesday’s City Council meeting was drafted with help from Chicago Police, the city’s Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, and advocates against human trafficking.

It includes hefty fines and stricter regulations to give police more tools to shut down businesses that, O’Shea believes are preying upon innocent women and destroying the quality of life in Chicago neighborhoods.

If the City Council signs off on the proposed crackdown, fines would quintuple — to \$5,000 for each licensing violation.

To protect victims of human trafficking, massage parlor employees arrested for prostitution could get off if they can prove the crime was committed “under duress” or was somehow “coerced.”

Massage therapists would have to be at least 18, up from a current age limit of 15. They would also need a valid license. No massage parlor would be allowed to have a “direct passageway” from the business to a private residence.

The legislative crackdown follows a regulatory one in recent weeks that City Hall is calling, “Operation Hot Towel.”

Prostitution arrests were made at six Chicago massage parlors, triggering 178 citations, 11 “cease-and-desist” orders against unlicensed businesses and five orders to correct violations.

On Tuesday, O’Shea was asked how many houses of prostitution in Chicago are masquerading as massage parlors.

“I think we have dozens and dozens across the city . . . That’s just the tip of the iceberg,” he said.

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