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HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## Arnold Viersen, MP

Peace River—Westlock



August 31, 2022

Hon. Sean Fraser, PC, MP  
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and  
Citizenship  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Hon. Carla Qualtrough, PC, MP  
Minister of Employment, Workforce  
Development and Disability Inclusion  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ministers,

I write to you today to draw your attention to the 68 temporary foreign work (TFW) permits that have been granted for massage therapists in Canada between 2015 and 2021.

Effective since 2012, ministerial instructions have guided immigration officers:

“...not to process any work permit applications from foreign nationals seeking employment in businesses that are in sectors where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a risk of sexual exploitation – namely strip clubs, escort services and massage parlours.”

*Ministerial Instructions protecting vulnerable foreign workers from the risk of abuse and exploitation in sex trade related businesses, 2012*

I am concerned that the use of title ‘massage therapist’ is a way to get around the current Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) ministerial instructions, which aim to protect applicants from exploitative industries. Massage parlours are often a front for brothels, where women are exploited daily. Temporary foreign workers seeking employment are especially susceptible to having to work in these industries, and thus IRCC ministerial directions rightly seek to mitigate the risk of exploitation.

Blacklocks Reporter has revealed that the number of foreign workers claiming they are massage therapists has increased significantly since 2015. In 2015/2016, zero temporary foreign work permits for “massage therapist” were granted for temporary foreign work and by 2020/2021, this number rose to 28.



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It is likely that since this ministerial instruction was implemented in 2012, applicants who end up working in massage parlours (either by choice or coercion by a trafficker) are instead encouraged to apply for the work permit as a massage therapist.

Additionally, the number of employers that have been endorsing the temporary foreign work permits of applicants is extremely concerning, as this is likely a front for traffickers.

Finally, I am alarmed as there seems to be a disconnect between your departments leading to a lack of oversight and protection for potentially exploited individuals. Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the department that granted the permits, states that: “The department does not conduct criminal investigations” and “intervening in human trafficking cases” is beyond its mandate. Also, IRCC has admitted it has not investigated whether any temporary foreign workers admitted as massage therapists are being trafficked or exploited.

Ministers, I am seeking answers to the following questions:

- When individuals apply under the category of massage therapists, does IRCC or ESDC require any official documentation of their Registered Massage Therapist certification?
- As per the Ministerial Instructions, are the employers thoroughly reviewed during the application to ensure they are not strip clubs, escort services or massage parlours where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a risk of sexual exploitation.
- When temporary foreign workers arrive in Canada through the massage therapist stream, are they provided with documentation in their own language warning about the links between massage parlours and human trafficking?
- Why has there been no follow up from either of your departments with massage therapy TFW applicants to ensure they are free from exploitation?
- Will you review the use of massage therapist for a temporary foreign work permit?

Ministers, I request that you take immediate action to review the application of this policy. Secondly, in cases where there could be exploitation, I urge you to immediately involve law enforcement.

I look forward to hearing how you will address this issue. Canada must close any loophole or opportunity for vulnerable individuals to be trafficked and exploited to and throughout our country.

Sincerely,



Arnold Viersen, MP  
Peace River – Westlock

