



State Reps. Mike Ramone (*in photo, left*), Bryon Short & James Johnson were among those who joined Gov. John Carney in his Wilmington office Wednesday as he signed House Bill 35 into law.

NEWS:

New Law Intended to Curtail Illegal Activity at Massage Parlors

JULY 28, 2017 – A bill signed into law this week is targeting massage parlors that are being used as fronts for organized crime and hotbeds for illegal activity, including human trafficking and prostitution.

[House Bill 35 \(as amended\)](#) is a bipartisan bill that cleared the General Assembly last month without a dissenting vote. When it takes effect in six months, the new law will require all massage establishments to be licensed; to adhere to sanitary regulations that will be established by the Department of Health and Social Services; and to submit to inspection by health officials.

Currently, individuals working at massage parlors are licensed and regulated by the state. However, the establishments themselves are unlicensed. The new legislation changes this.

State Rep. Steve Smyk, R-Milton-Lewes, one of the legislation's prime sponsors, said it was needed to rein-in massage parlors that are being used as a pretense for criminal acts.

State Rep. Bryon Short, D-Highland Woods, another prime sponsor of the legislation, said his involvement began with constituent complaints about Philadelphia Pike massage parlors operating late into the night.

"What we found even more disturbing is that we have human trafficking taking place, with women being held against their free will and housed at the parlors," said Rep. Short, speaking on the subject earlier this year. "These illicit parlors are often located in nondescript suburban settings, nestled right in our communities. Under our current code, it's very difficult for law enforcement to go after these establishments directly."



State Rep. Steve Smyk

Rep. Smyk also cited illegal massage parlor activity in his district, noting a 2015 arrest of two New York women at a Lewes massage establishment -- Best Quality Spa -- on prostitution charges.

"Many of the illicit massage operations in Delaware are owned and run by out-of-state crime organizations that have a nearly endless supply of personnel and a staggering number of locations operating throughout the nation," said Rep Smyk, a former Delaware State Trooper. "Targeting the venues where they do business is one of the most effective ways to interrupt and limit their activities."

Under the new law, a person found guilty of unlawfully operating, managing, owning, or advertising a massage establishment, could face up to one year in jail and a maximum fine of \$2,300.

State Reps. Deborah Hudson (R-Fairthorne), Ruth Briggs King (R-Georgetown) & Mike Ramone (R-Pike Creek South) are among the House Republican Caucus members supporting the bill as co-sponsors.