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TDLR's new Anti-Trafficking Unit received 42 leads in 2020

AUSTIN – In its first full year of operation, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation's Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU) received 42 leads that led to one illicit (unlicensed) massage establishment closing its doors, two criminal arrests and two survivor outcries.

Because TDLR regulates massage therapists, massage establishments, cosmetologists and nail salons, the agency has a potential nexus with human trafficking. TDLR employees can be the first ally in contact with potential human trafficking victims, so all TDLR employees receive training on how to recognize and respond to human trafficking situations. Members of the ATU also receive special trauma-informed training on assisting human trafficking survivors.

"Our Anti-Trafficking Unit has accomplished a great deal in its first year, but unfortunately, there is a great deal more for us to do in the fight against human trafficking. I am grateful for the support this program has received from Gov. Greg Abbott, the Texas Legislature, law enforcement and organizations that help human trafficking survivors," said Brian E. Francis, TDLR executive director. "This is important work. TDLR employees will not rest in our effort with our coalition partners to free those caught in this web."

The eight-member ATU works with local, state and federal law enforcement and non-governmental agencies to conduct inspections in facilities required to hold a license issued by TDLR, including massage establishments and nail salons, that are suspected of participating in human trafficking. The ATU folds into TDLR's existing anti-trafficking efforts that include:

- Periodic, unannounced inspections of massage establishments and cosmetology salons by TDLR Field Inspection employees.
- Aggressive prosecution of both licensed and unlicensed service providers by the TDLR Enforcement Division.

In 2020, the ATU received 42 leads regarding possible illicit massage businesses: 13 from members of the public and 29 from other governmental agencies.

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The team expects to open even more cases in 2021; COVID-related closures in 2020 cut the year short for investigations. Team members had just completed six weeks of training when massage establishments were ordered closed due to COVID-19. While massage establishments were officially closed briefly for COVID, ATU members participated in additional training and performed online research, collaborating with law enforcement and non-governmental organizations to identify areas where trafficking may still be occurring.

Texans who believe that an unlicensed massage business may be operating near them, or who are concerned that nail salon employees may be human trafficking victims, can now report those concerns directly to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation via email: reportHT@tdlr.texas.gov.

To get help from the National Human Trafficking Hotline: [1-888-373-7888](tel:1-888-373-7888) or text **HELP** or **INFO** to **BeFree** (233733)

To report suspected human trafficking to Federal law enforcement: [1-866-347-2423](tel:1-866-347-2423)

About TDLR

TDLR provides regulatory oversight for a broad range of occupations, businesses, facilities, and equipment in Texas. The agency protects the health and safety of Texans by ensuring they are served by qualified, licensed professionals. Inspections of individuals, businesses, and equipment are done on a regular basis to safeguard the public. Currently, the agency regulates 39 business and occupational licensing programs with more than 1,000,000 licensees across the state.

Visit TDLR's [website](#) for more information and resources. You can search the [TDLR licensee database](#), and also find [past violations](#) in which a final order was issued against companies or individuals. TDLR's Customer Service line is available anytime between 7 a.m. until 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, at 1-800-803-9202. TDLR representatives are fluent in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.

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