

To:
Mayor of Newmarket
Councillors of Newmarket
City staff of Newmarket

OHKYA is a group that support the Hong Kong diaspora in Ontario. There are lots of HongKongers living in Newmarket. We are writing this letter to express our concerns about the proposed amendments to the bylaws of Newmarket, which will disproportionately affect Asian massage workers and businesses, further contributing to systemic racism.

The new bylaw (Business By-law 2020-31 be amended to adopt the proposed Personal Wellness Establishment) will mandate workers be trained by accredited institutions, which often have English language skills requirements.

This policy will create barriers for Asian workers in massage parlours in Newmarket. Low-income, non-English speaking Asian workers are not be able to attend college and obtain the required credentials. They will not be able to work in Newmarket, and their massage parlours will be shut down.

Although the bylaw claims an exception is available to “non-Western practice,” the application for the exception (*e.g.* collecting extensive documents, being interviewed by the town staff) is intimidating and exclusionary. The lack of accreditation from Canadian colleges and other institutions does not mean workers are unskilled, but those who trained abroad or by informal training on-the-job training will not meet the criteria for the exception.

Asian massage workers offer non-therapeutic and non-medical massage treatment. There are no safety or health concerns raised by the clients or workers. The Asian community is already heavily hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and facing anti-Asian racism. The Town of Newmarket should not impose extra social and economic barriers to prevent them from working, which may lead to the shutdown of Asian massage parlours.

We are also concerned about the repressive and discriminatory approach of the Town of Newmarket against sex workers. Newmarket should treat sex workers in a fair and unbiased manner and promote sex worker safety, dignity, and well-being.

This policy will be perceived as anti-Asian and racist because Asian workers and businesses would be affected disproportionately. We urge the Town of Newmarket to adopt an anti-racist lens to this bylaw: remove the requirement of having accredited credentials to work in the proposed bylaw so that Asian workers can continue to work and massage parlours can continue to operate and serve the community. We also call on the town to take further steps to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in Newmarket.

Regards,

