

# Santa Barbara's Updated Massage Ordinance: Does This Affect Me?

Proposed changes to Municipal Code Chapter 5.76

## What is this?

The City is updating its rules for massage businesses. The goals are to set basic standards, make sure the people giving massages are qualified, and keep massage businesses from being used as a cover for human trafficking or prostitution. The rules work alongside state certification by the California Massage Therapy Council (CAMTC). Massage services are **not** treated as adult entertainment.

## I'm a CAMTC-certified massage therapist.

You do **not** need a City exception certificate or a City background check. The business you work for needs a City permit, must list you on its staff roster, and must notify the City within 10 days when you start or leave. Keep your CAMTC ID card with you while working.

## I give massages but I'm not CAMTC-certified.

You will generally need CAMTC certification. There are two exceptions:

- **Limited Exception Certificate** — if, on or before November 10, 2026, you were working as a massage therapist in Santa Barbara (and you still work here and completed at least 200 hours of training), or you are currently enrolled at an approved massage school and will complete 200 hours of training. Limited Exception Certificate shall remain in effect until **December 31, 2029**.

- **Indefinite Exception Certificate** — if you worked in Santa Barbara for at least 10 years before November 10, 2026, still work here, and have completed at least 200 hours of training. Indefinite Exception Certificate must provide annual employment verification.

Exception applicants complete a Live Scan background check at their own cost.

## I own or manage a massage business.

You need a **Massage Establishment Permit**: a Standard permit (renewed yearly) or a Sole Proprietorship permit for a one-person business (renewed every two years). Keep a staff roster (if holding a standard permit), an appointment log (date, start time, therapist), and an outcall log that includes the address, for two years. **You do not need to record clients' health information.** Owners and managers who are CAMTC-certified are not background-checked; other owners and managers need to complete a Live Scan background check through the City. You are responsible for your staff's compliance with the ordinance.

## Will my other staff need a background check?

Only owners and managers who are not CAMTC-certified require a Live Scan background check. Other staff are checked only if the City issues a written screening order to a business, for up to two years, after certain enforcement actions at that business.

The business learns only whether a person is eligible, never the record. Ineligibility may be appealed. A conviction set aside because the person was a trafficking victim does not count.

Cost for the Live Scan background check is responsibility of the business owner.

## I work out of my home.

A home-based business is allowed with a Sole Proprietorship permit if you are the only person working there, there are no exterior signs, no merchandise is sold, you have no more than 2 clients at once and 4 client visits a day, and the home stays residential in character. The City may inspect only with your consent at the time, or with a court-issued inspection warrant. Saying no is not a violation. An inspection never includes your private living areas.

## I only do outcall massages (I travel to clients).

You need a Sole Proprietorship permit with an outcall-only designation. There are no premises inspections.

## I rent space to a massage business.

Your tenant must give the City a copy of a lease authorizing massage use, or a notarized acknowledgment from you. The City may notify you when a permit is issued. If a tenant's permit is revoked, the City may ask that no massage business operate at the property for **up to one year**. You must receive notice, may appeal, and may take part in the appeal hearing. The City must consider what you knew, what you did about it (such as acting to end the tenancy), and whether a shorter period or conditions would be enough. The City must prove this by clear and convincing evidence.

## Will my massage business be inspected?

**Commercial premise massage establishments** will have an annual inspection and may be inspected during business hours without notice.

**Home Based massage establishments** will have an inspection every (2) years and may be inspected during business hours without notice and only when consent is given at the time of inspection. Inspections shall be conducted in a reasonable manner and are not to disrupt any current services.

**Out-Call massage businesses** will not have premise inspections.

## Who doesn't need a permit?

Licensed health professionals working within their license; athletic trainers for whom massage is not their main job; licensed barbers, cosmetologists, estheticians, and manicurists massaging only the head, neck, arms, hands, lower legs, and feet; no-touch somatic and craniosacral-only practitioners; unpaid students in supervised internships; hospital and health facility employees; and anyone giving a free massage to a family member or friend with no business involved.

## What if the City wants to suspend or revoke a permit?

The Reviewing Officer issues a written decision stating the reasons. You have 15 days (20 if mailed) to appeal to the Chief of Police, who holds a hearing and issues a written decision with findings. Permit stays in effect until the decision is final, except in an emergency "summary suspension" for an immediate threat to public safety (appeal hearing within 10 days). The City has the burden of proof, and you can seek court review. The same process applies to denials and ineligibility notices.

## What is prohibited for everyone?

Whether or not a permit is required: no touching of the genitals or anal region during a massage (including through clothing or draping); no giving a massage while under the influence; no alcohol or drugs on the premises during business hours (lawful prescriptions excepted); and no sexually oriented material or merchandise. Penalties are under Municipal Code Chapter 1.28.

## Ordinance timing and contact information

Effective date: [TBD] Council hearing: November 10, 2026 – 2:00 PM  
Questions or comments: [Permits@sbgd.com](mailto:Permits@sbgd.com) | 805-897-2333

## If you or someone you know is being forced to work or trade sex:

**National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 • Text 233733**  
Free, confidential, 24 hours, many languages. In an emergency, call 911.