

SF massage parlors could face crackdown

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By Vic Lee

SAN FRANCISCO (KGO) -- San Francisco massage parlors that engage in prostitution could soon face a crackdown. Current city law allows them to operate almost with impunity, but one San Francisco supervisor is introducing tough new legislation that would allow the city to take action.

Supervisor Carmen Chu's legislation attempts to close loopholes in city law that makes it nearly impossible to shut down massage parlors fronting as brothels. She became aware of the problem after an undercover cop was solicited for sex at this health care spa in her district.

The business was half a block from an elementary school. It finally closed on its own. Under current city law, massage parlor permits are issued only after extensive review.

"You go through city planning, you have a very public, open process in order to receive your permit," Chu said.

But Chu says businesses such as spas can provide massages as a side business without the same scrutiny. Her bill would require a tough review process.

"That would allow for the community to have input about whether they think it's appropriate," Chu said.

Chu is also trying to make it easier for the city to shut down massage parlors cited for prostitution.

The health department issues the permits, but says it can revoke them only for health code violations, not for prostitution. And police claim they cannot shut them down because they do not issue the permits. Chu says both agencies will now work together at permit hearings.

"We will ask the chief to send the officers who actually did the investigation, with the sting operations, to the hearings and to give evidence," San Francisco public health director Dr. Mitch Katz said.

"Why that is important is because the Department of Public Health can actually revoke a permit if they are found in violation of three violations in a year," Chu said.

Chu will introduce her legislation at the supervisors' board meeting on Tuesday. She has the support of the mayor, who in the past has called for tougher enforcement of massage parlors.

For video, visit: http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/assignment_7&id=6736587