

Public Records Request Guide

For Licensed Massage Therapists Researching Establishment Licensing Laws

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Why You're Doing This

Twenty-three states have some form of establishment licensing for massage therapy businesses. Every single one of those laws was passed with a promise: this will protect the profession, help shut down sexually oriented businesses (SOBs) disguised as massage, and make your work safer and more legitimate.

Nobody measured whether that promise was kept.

We don't know how many establishment licenses have been denied because of criminal history. We don't know how many inspections have been conducted, how many violations found, how many businesses closed. The data exists — it's sitting in state board files and annual reports — but nobody has put it together and asked the question: is this working?

That's what this guide helps you do. You're going to request that data. It's public record. You have the right to see it. And when enough of us ask these questions in enough states, we will have the first real evidence base on whether establishment licensing is doing what we were told it would do.

Part 1: Find Out Where to Send Your Request

Every state has a public records law — often called an Open Records Law, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), or Sunshine Law. The name varies by state, but the right is the same: government records are public, and citizens can request them.

Here's how to find where your request needs to go:

Step 1: Identify Your State Board

Your state massage therapy board is the primary agency to contact. This is where establishment license records, inspection reports, enforcement actions, and disciplinary history are held.

Search: [Your state] Board of Massage Therapy — or — [Your state] massage therapy licensing. You are looking for the official .gov website.

Step 2: Find the Public Records or FOIA Contact

First ask your state board if they have these records.

Once you're on the board's official website, look for one of these:

- A "Public Records" or "Open Records" link (often in the footer or under "About")
- A "Contact Us" page — ask for the public records officer or custodian of records
- If the board is under a larger agency (like a Department of Health or Department of Commerce), the records request may go to that parent agency

If you can't find it on the website, call the board directly and ask: "Who do I contact to submit a public records request?" They are required to tell you.

Step 3: Check Your State's Records Law

Before you submit, it helps to know your state's specific law so you can cite it in your request. This makes it harder for anyone to ignore or delay.

I have the list of states with establishment licensing laws and direct link to the laws at www.lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com

Part 2: What to Ask For

Be specific. Vague requests get vague responses — or get rejected. The more precisely you describe the records you want, the faster and more useful the response will be. **Sample letter below.**

Here are the five most important data sets for this research project:

1. Establishment License Counts

Ask for: The total number of massage therapy establishment licenses (or business licenses, permits, or certificates of operation) issued, active, expired, denied, and revoked in your state — ideally broken down by year from the date the law went into effect through the current date.

Why: This tells us whether the licensing system is actually being used and how it has grown or changed over time.

2. Denial and Revocation Records

Ask for: The number of establishment license applications denied, and the stated reasons for denial (criminal history, failed inspection, SOB classification, etc.). Also the number of establishment licenses revoked or suspended, and the reasons.

Why: This is the most direct measure of whether the law is catching bad actors. If zero licenses have been denied for criminal history in a state with a background check requirement, that tells us something important.

[VERIFY: Some states may redact individual case details but must provide aggregate counts — make clear you are requesting aggregate data, not individual records, to reduce privacy objections.]

3. Inspection Records

Ask for: The number of establishment inspections conducted per year, the number of violations found, the types of violations cited most frequently, and the number of re-inspections required.

Why: Inspections are only useful if they happen. Many states require inspections but have no documented enforcement. This data reveals whether the inspection mandate is real or just paperwork.

4. Enforcement Actions

Ask for: Any disciplinary actions taken against massage therapy establishments — fines, cease-and-desist orders, license suspensions or revocations, criminal referrals to law enforcement or district attorneys.
Ask for aggregate data by year.

Why: A law with no enforcement is a suggestion. This data shows whether boards are actually using the authority they were given.

5. Annual Reports

Ask for: Any annual reports, biennial reports, or legislative reports produced by the board that include establishment licensing data, enforcement statistics, or board activity summaries.

Why: Many boards already compile this data — you just need to ask for it. Annual reports are often the fastest path to aggregate numbers without having to wait for a custom data pull.

Part 3: The Letter — Fill In and Send

Use this template as-is or adapt it. Keep it professional and specific. Most states require a response within 5–10 business days, though complex requests may take longer.

Send it by email if the board has a public records email address. If not, mail it certified. Keep a copy.

PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST

[DATE]

[NAME OF BOARD OR AGENCY]

[MAILING ADDRESS OR EMAIL ADDRESS]

[CITY, STATE, ZIP]

RE: Public Records Request — Massage Therapy Establishment Licensing Data

To the Public Records Officer or Custodian of Records:

Pursuant to [INSERT YOUR STATE'S PUBLIC RECORDS LAW AND CITATION — e.g., the Texas Public Information Act, Gov. Code Chapter 552], I am requesting access to the following public records held by the [NAME OF BOARD OR AGENCY].

I am a licensed massage therapist conducting independent research on the effectiveness of massage therapy establishment licensing laws. I am requesting aggregate data only — I am not requesting any individual client records, personally identifiable information, or records protected by privacy law.

Specifically, I am requesting the following records for the period from [DATE YOUR STATE'S LAW WENT INTO EFFECT] through the present:

1. The total number of massage therapy establishment licenses (or business licenses, permits, or certificates of operation) issued each year, broken down by year.
2. The total number of establishment license applications denied each year, and the stated reasons for denial (e.g., criminal history, failed inspection, sexually oriented business classification, incomplete application).
3. The total number of establishment licenses revoked or suspended each year, and the stated reasons.
4. The total number of establishment inspections conducted each year, the number of violations cited, and the most frequently cited violation categories.
5. The total number of disciplinary actions taken against massage therapy establishments each year, including fines assessed, cease-and-desist orders, license suspensions, license revocations, and criminal referrals to law enforcement or district attorneys.
6. Any annual reports, biennial reports, or legislative reports produced by the board that include establishment licensing data or enforcement statistics.

If any of the records I have requested are not available or are exempt from disclosure, please identify the specific records withheld and cite the specific statutory exemption you are relying upon.

I am requesting this information in electronic format if available (spreadsheet or PDF). If there is a fee for fulfilling this request, please notify me in advance of the total cost before processing.

Please respond within the timeframe required by [YOUR STATE'S PUBLIC RECORDS LAW]. You may reach me at the contact information below.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

[YOUR FULL NAME]

[LICENSED MASSAGE THERAPIST — LICENSE #]

[MAILING ADDRESS]

[EMAIL ADDRESS]

[PHONE NUMBER]

Part 4: After You Send It

What to expect

Most states require a response within 5–10 business days. That doesn't always mean you'll have the records in hand — it may mean they acknowledge your request and give you a timeline for fulfillment.

Some things that may happen:

- They fulfill the request promptly. Great. Document everything and share it with this research project.
- They say the records don't exist. Ask them to confirm in writing that no such records are maintained. That is itself a finding.
- They say the records are partially exempt. Ask them to produce whatever is not exempt and provide a specific citation for what they are withholding.
- They don't respond. Follow up in writing after the required response window. If they still don't respond, you may have grounds to appeal or file a complaint with your state's oversight body.
- They charge a fee. Most states waive fees for small requests or for requests from the press or researchers. You can request a fee waiver by noting that this is for public interest research.

When you get the data

Once you receive a response, here's what to do:

- Save everything — the response letter, the records themselves, and any explanations of what was withheld.
- Note the date the law went into effect in your state and compare that to when the data starts.
- Look for zero counts — years with no denials, no revocations, no enforcement actions. Those tell a story.
- Look for trends — is enforcement increasing, decreasing, or flat?
- **Share your findings with this research project by [filling out this form](#).**

If they say no

You can appeal. Every state has a process. Search "[state name] public records appeal" or "[state name] open records appeal" for the specific procedure. Many states have an Attorney General's office or ombudsman that handles public records disputes.

You can also ask for help. MuckRock (muckrock.com) is a nonprofit that specializes in public records requests and can help you file, track, and appeal.

ACTION BOX — DO THIS TODAY

1. Find your state board's website and ask them for their records on the specific questions noted above. If needed, locate the public records or FOIA contact.
2. Fill in the letter template above with your state's public records law, your board's name and address, and the date your state's establishment licensing law went into effect.
3. Send the request. Keep a copy.

4. When you receive a response, share what you find. [Fill out this form.](#)

5. If you hit a wall, don't stop. Document the refusal and contact MuckRock at muckrock.com for help.

Not sure where to start? Go to lookbeforeyoubookamassage.com for direct links to your state board and the establishment licensing guide for your state.