

SF takes steps to shut down brothels

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By Vic Lee

SAN FRANCISCO (KGO) -- A bill that would make it easier for San Francisco to shut down massage parlors that are operating as brothels passed its first major hurdle Thursday.

The Vicente Fitness and Healthcare Spa had been busted for prostitution twice in eight months since it opened last August.

Neighbors say it is open again.

Parents of nearby Dianne Feinstein Elementary School cannot believe how persistent the spa owners have been.

"Every morning I take my children to the school, past the business door and you see the used condoms and I don't know how to explain it to them," parent Mei Liu said.

At City Hall, the planning commission held a hearing on **Supervisor Carmen Chu's** bill, which would close loopholes in city law that make it nearly impossible to shut down massage parlors fronting as brothels.

In the crowd were parents from the elementary school, as well as other supporters and opponents of Chu's legislation.

"It's well documented that San Francisco is a hub for sex trafficking and these parlors are integral parts of these crimes," Shakari Byerly of the San Francisco Women's Political Committee, said.

"We feel it's part of a bigger attack that's going on; it's really a moral crusade against massage parlors," Rachel West, of the U.S. Prostitutes Collective, said.

The inability to shut down the Vicente Spa was what triggered Chu's legislation. She represents the Sunset District.

The spa has been the target of parents from the Diane Feinstein Elementary School half a block away. They have picketed the facility; they went to police; they have invited Chu to their PTA meetings.

But parents found it was almost impossible for the city to close down the spa.

Now with Chu's legislation, parents feel a bit more optimistic that the city can finally close down the spa. Still, there is some skepticism.

"It looks like we have a reasonable fix coming in the horizon now, but the city just has trouble getting anything done," parent Matt Mitguard said.

The planning commission voted to amend the massage parlor ordinance, which means Chu's bill can move forward.

It now goes before other city agencies and then to the Board of Supervisors.

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