



Proponent Testimony, Senate Bill 238

Testimony before the Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee
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Lakewood, Ohio

On behalf of
The American Art Therapy Association
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Chairman McColley, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 238, which establishes licensure for the practice of art therapy in the state of Ohio. I would also like to thank Ranking Member Antonio, and Committee Members, Senator Kunze, Senator Maharath and Skyes for co-sponsorship of this bill.

My name is Gretchen Miller, and I live in Lakewood, Ohio. I am a board certified art therapist with an undergraduate degree in art therapy from Bowling Green State University, and a Master of Arts degree in Art Therapy from Ursuline College. I am also an Advanced Certified Trauma Practitioner through the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children. My professional practice as an Art Therapist has served at risk youth, families, and adults for 20 years, particularly those clients impacted by trauma and loss in the form of childhood neglect, abandonment, domestic violence, bereavement, and homelessness.

In Cleveland, I presently provide art therapy group services for survivors of human trafficking at the Renee Jones Empowerment Center and I also work as an Art Therapist at Akron Children's Hospital's Intensive Services Program in the Division of Pediatric Psychiatry and Psychology, working with adolescents who are facing mental health challenges. In addition to my clinical work, I am a Visiting Instructor at Ursuline College, where I teach in the Counseling and Art Therapy Program, the only graduate program in Ohio that provides clinical training in art therapy.

I am here today testifying not only as an Ohio art therapist, but also as a national board member of the American Art Therapy Association. I would like to express the Association's strong support for SB 238, an Act to provide licensure and regulation for professional art therapists. The American Art Therapy Association is a national professional membership organization that represents thousands of practitioners, educators and researchers engaged in the art therapy profession. The Association works in concert with Ohio's Buckeye Art Therapy Association and 37 other state and regional chapters to promote the highest standards of art therapy practice to the public.

Art therapy is a distinct mental health and behavioral science profession that offers a unique approach for assessing and treating mental health conditions by providing a means of communication for those who cannot find the words to express anxiety, pain or emotions as a result of trauma, combat, physical abuse, loss of brain function, depression, severe illness, and other debilitating health conditions. Art therapy is widely recognized for the benefits it provides for people of all ages and with a broad range of physical, psychological, behavioral, and developmental conditions.

SB 238 seeks to create a Professional Art Therapist license administered by the Ohio Counseling, Social Work, and Marriage and Family Therapy Board. It requires the minimum of a master's degree from independently accredited academic programs, at least two years of supervised clinical experience, and passing of a national certification examination to qualify for licenses to practice art therapy. These requirements meet or exceed comparable requirements for other mental health professions currently licensed in Ohio. Art therapists also must meet comparable national standards for professional certification and adhere to comparable standards of professional conduct and ethical practice.

Currently, sixteen states have statutes or state regulations that provide for licensure of art therapists or recognize art therapy as a distinct mental health profession for purposes of state hiring and title protection. Ten additional states and the District of Columbia provide coverage of services by certified art therapists under state Medicaid or Medicaid waiver programs. We now urge this Committee to approve SB 238 and allow Ohio to join these states in assuring that consumers have access to art therapy services and benefit from the protections that come with professional licensing. These include having a precise scope of practice defined in state law, specific requirements for initial and continuing competency to practice, required ethical standards of conduct, and regulatory oversight that assures that only appropriately trained and competent professionals qualify to practice art therapy in our state.

We commend the initial results of the state of Ohio's concerted efforts to address the crisis of opioid use and drug-overdose deaths as well as the continuing shortage of qualified and licensed mental health professionals and the dedication to continuing this life-saving work. Between 2017 and 2018, the Department of Health reported a 22.7% decrease in unintentional drug overdose deaths. Although 2018 represented the lowest overdose death rate since 2015, 3,764 Ohioans still died from unintentional drug overdoses.¹ Unintentional drug poisoning has been the leading cause of injury-related death in Ohio since it surpassed motor vehicle crashes in 2007.² A further testament to the beginning of direly-needed improvements to access to mental health care, Ohio's ranking by Mental Health America, a national non-profit that annually ranks states based on community mental health needs and access to care, improved from 37 in 2018 to 28 in 2020 in mental health workforce availability to address public mental health and substance abuse needs. However, significantly more work must be done as Ohio still ranks among the bottom half of all states

¹ Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, *2018 Ohio Drug Overdose Data: General Findings*.

² Ohio Department of Health (2020, January 10). Drug Overdose. Retrieved from <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/violence-injury-prevention-program/drug-overdose>

in this area, with only one mental health provider per 470 individuals.³ We appreciate Governor Mike DeWine's commitment to continue saving lives through his RecoveryOhio initiative and are confident that the enactment of SB 238 will support these efforts.

Licensure of art therapists can provide a reasonable and cost-effective approach to help address continued public need for highly trained and qualified mental health professionals. This should be an issue of concern for this Committee, given the fact that almost all states surrounding Ohio currently provide for licensure of art therapists, or may soon make licenses available. Kentucky and Maryland offer professional art therapist licenses, and Pennsylvania and New York currently license art therapists as professional counselors and creative arts therapists. In addition to Ohio, ten states and the District of Columbia have considered art therapy licensure legislation in the 2020 sessions. Notably, a licensure bill has moved through the Virginia legislature and awaits action by the Governor, and a licensing resolution is waiting final adoption in the Council of the District of Columbia. The lack of an art therapist license in our state will continue to present a major obstacle for art therapists who obtain professional training in other states and want to return, or relocate, to practice in Ohio.

In conclusion, licensure will benefit Ohio consumers by increasing the number of qualified mental health professionals in our state, promoting competent, effective and safe practice of art therapy, increasing diversity in the mental health services available to the public, and providing consumers with assurance that needed art therapy services will be provided only by appropriately trained and certified mental health professionals.

The American Art Therapy Association supports the need for licensure of art therapists in Ohio and respectfully urges the Committee to approve SB 238 and move it forward for consideration in the Ohio Senate.

Thank you Chairman McColley, and members of the Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 238 as both a representative of the American Art Therapy Association and as a practicing Ohio art therapist. I would be happy to answer any questions that committee members may have.

³ Mental Health America, Inc., *The State of Mental Health in America, 2020*. Alexandria, VA.