

PROPONENT TESTIMONY
Senate Bill 238

Jennifer Schwartz Mrazek, ATR-BC, ATCS
3411 Helen Road
Shaker Heights, OH 44122
216-401-7169
Jennifer.schwartz@ursuline.edu

June 1, 2020

Honorable Chairman McColley, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and Members of the Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee,

My name is Jennifer Schwartz Mrazek, and I am a registered, board-certified art therapist and certified art therapy supervisor with over 25 years of experience working in medical art therapy. I served as an art therapist at the Centers for Dialysis Care in Cleveland for 16 years, and Program Manager and Executive Director at the Art Therapy Studio for 3 years before moving into my current full time position in higher education. I have been teaching art therapy for 21 years, and currently serve as the Department Chair, Field Placement Coordinator, and Assistant Professor for the pre-professional undergraduate art therapy major at Ursuline College in Pepper Pike near Cleveland. My life's work has been to spread the beneficial impact of art making to promote healing and wellness in our communities.

Since the mid-20th century, art therapists have been engaged to help complex and sometimes vulnerable individuals such as active-duty military and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, survivors of sexual and domestic violence, cancer patients and others with chronic and acute medical illnesses, the grieving, those in recovery who struggle with addiction, people with cognitive and neurological challenges such as autism and dementia, those with acute and chronic mental illnesses, and children and adolescents who have experienced adverse childhood events and struggle with behavioral health. Unfortunately, the citizens of Ohio have an increasing need for evidence-based mental health services to address these problems. According to the Ohio Department of Health, from 2007-2018, suicide was the leading cause of death for children ages 10-14 and the second leading cause of death for those 18-34 years old. During that time, Ohio saw an overall increase in death by suicide for citizens of all ages by a whopping 45%. And in the last few months during the corona virus outbreak, we have seen an increase in mental health problems among everyone, especially medical workers and essential workers. Now more than ever, we need to be making mental health services more available to help people with depression and other mental health problems cope with the life's challenges. Back in 2016, the American Hospital Association proposed "broadening the concept of the health care workforce" to address current challenges in behavioral health care delivery to include "nontraditional health care workers". In 2018, the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis documented a shortage of master's level licensed counselors in Ohio by over 1,800 clinicians, and project a shortage of over 2,000 by 2030. These statistics assume no dramatic shift in the community need for mental health services, based on 2018 projections of unmet need. Consequently, the Behavioral Health and Economics Network, concluded that "an infusion of qualified behavioral health providers is needed to drive down avoidable hospitalization costs,

reduce recidivism with justice-involved clients, address the substance use epidemic and increase access to timely, evidence-based care” (2018). Now more than ever, our citizens need the help of a wide range of services.

As an art therapist working on a medical team, and as a supervisor of art therapy clinicians, I fielded referrals to help patients who could not find the words to adequately express their experiences. For the traumatized, words are often inadequate to describe and process what they have been through. For those with neurological disorders, words may be fully unavailable. My team was also engaged with patients who were severely depressed or non-compliant with their treatment regimen. Perceived as non-threatening and employing art media that is constant, dependable, and even pleasurable to use, we do help engage so called “difficult patients” who then become invested in their therapy program. Art making within a trusting therapeutic environment provides an accessible way for people to express themselves visually, document memories, and build upon strengths. It’s the art therapist’s job to introduce techniques that are accessible, and appropriate to the skill level and clinical needs of each patient. Art therapists use observational skills to collect data about each patient’s physical capabilities, cognitive skills, emotional status, and coping skills displayed in their behavior throughout the session. Therapeutic goals and objectives are determined and worked towards progressively. We use all of this information to design, offer and support the best creative process for each patient or group of patients, offering adaptations as needed to promote success. As such we are fluent in a wide range of visual art media and processes, all applied based on our knowledge of psychology, neuroscience, and evidence-based best-practices.

Art Therapy is a treatment of choice when words are not enough. It is a long-standing, recognized therapy that is used to help many Ohio citizens through their most challenging life experiences. To expand access to qualified mental health providers, to protect the public, and to protect the profession of art therapy, I encourage this committee to support SB238. Thank you for your attention and consideration on this important issue. I am delighted to answer any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Schwartz Mrazek, MAAT, ATR-BC, ATCS
Assistant Professor, Department Chair, Field Placement Coordinator
Ursuline College

References

American Hospital Association (2016). The state of the behavioral health workforce: A literature review. Washington, DC: AHA.

Behavioral Health + Economics Network (2018). Addressing the behavioral health workforce shortage.” Washington, DC: BHECON.

Ohio Department of Health. (2019). Suicide Deaths Increased by 45% Among All Ohioans and by 56% Among Youth Ages 10-24 From 2007-2018.

<https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/media-center/odh-news-releases/ohio-suicide-demographics-trends-report>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. 2018. State-Level Projections of Supply and Demand for Behavioral Health Occupations: 2016-2030, Rockville, Maryland.

Wann, W. (2020, May 4). The coronavirus pandemic is pushing America into a mental health crisis. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/>