



Proponent Testimony, House Bill 557

Testimony before the Ohio House Health Committee
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Lakewood, Ohio

On behalf of
The American Art Therapy Association
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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairwoman Gavarone, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of House Bill 557, 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, John Barnes and Michele Lepore-Hagen, for their co-sponsorship of HB 557.

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 19 years, particularly those clients impacted by trauma and loss in the form of childhood neglect and abandonment, domestic violence, bereavement, and homelessness.

In Cleveland, I presently offer art therapy group services for survivors of human trafficking at the Renee Jones Empowerment Center and at Front Steps Housing and Services, a permanent housing program for adults transitioning out of homelessness and working on sustaining mental health recovery. 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 an adjunct professor 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.



As a member of the national Board of Directors of the American Art Therapy Association, I would like to express the Association's strong support for HB 557, an Act to provide licensure and regulation for professional art therapists. The American Art Therapy Association is a national professional membership organization that represents nearly 5,000 practitioners, educators and researchers engaged in the art therapy profession. The Association works in concert with the 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.

HB 557 seeks to create a Professional Art Therapist license administered by the State of Ohio Medical Board. It requires master's level academic and clinical training to qualify to practice art therapy that 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, fifteen 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. Five additional states and the District of Columbia provide coverage of services by certified art therapists under a variety of state Medicaid waiver programs. We now urge the Committee to approve HB 557 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.



Ohio is facing not only a growing crisis of opioid use and drug-overdose deaths but also a continuing shortage of qualified and licensed mental health professionals. The Ohio Department of Health reported in 2017 that unintentional drug overdose was the leading cause of injury-related death in the state, with Fentanyl and related drug overdoses causing the deaths of over 4,000 Ohio residents in 2016, an alarming 32.8 percent increase from 2015.¹ Also last year, Mental Health America, a national non-profit that annually ranks states based on community mental health needs and access to care, ranked Ohio 37th, among the bottom third of all states, in mental health workforce availability to address public mental health and substance abuse needs.²

Licensure of art therapists can provide a reasonable and cost-effective approach to help address Ohio's growing 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; Pennsylvania and New York currently license art therapists as professional counselors and creative arts therapists; and art therapists in Indiana and Michigan are now pursuing separate art therapy licenses in those states. 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 HB 557 and move it forward for consideration in the House of Representatives.

Thank you, Chairman Huffman, and members of the Health Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 557 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.

¹ Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, *2016 Ohio Drug Overdose Data: General Findings*, August 30, 2017.

² Mental Health America, Inc., *The State of Mental Health in America, 2018*. Alexandria, VA, November 15, 2017.