



April 11, 2018

Hon. Stephen A. Huffman
Chair, Health Committee
Ohio State House of Representatives
77 S. High St
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Huffman,

I am writing on behalf of the American Art Therapy Association to express our Association's strong support for House Bill 557, which would 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 and requires master's level academic and clinical training to qualify to practice art therapy. Art therapists must meet or exceed comparable requirements for other mental health professions currently licensed in Ohio as well national standards for professional certification and adhere to comparable standards of professional conduct and ethical practice.

States across the country recognize the need to license and regulate the profession of art therapy. 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. Joining these states by approving HB 557 would assure Ohio consumers access to art therapy services and offer them the benefit of protections that come with professional licensing. These include 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 only appropriately trained and competent professionals qualify to practice art therapy in Ohio.

Obtaining a distinct art therapy license has become an imperative for art therapists in Ohio and in growing numbers of states across the country as qualifying for professional counselor licenses to pursue professional practice becomes increasingly difficult. Legislation passed by the Ohio legislature in 2014

requires, as of January 1st of this year, that applicants for counseling licenses must hold master's degrees in mental health counseling from an Ohio college or university program that is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP), or degrees in mental health counseling from institutions in other states that closely conform to CACREP curriculum and program standards.

Given the highly specialized training required for competent and safe practice of art therapy, and the fact that art therapy master's degree programs now have separate national accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP), it is unlikely that many art therapy programs will choose to meet, or conform to, the CACREP program and curriculum standards. This will present a major obstacle for art therapists who obtain professional training in other states and want to return, or relocate, to practice in Ohio, especially as licenses are now available, or may soon be available, in most surrounding states. 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.

Unfortunately, this is happening at time when Ohio faces 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 among the bottom third of all states (37th) 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. Licensure will benefit Ohio consumers by promoting competent, effective and safe practice of art therapy, increasing diversity in the mental health services available in the state, 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.

Sincerely,



Christianne Strang, PhD, ATR-BC, CEDCAT-S
President, the American Art Therapy Association

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.