



Sponsor Testimony
HB 557 Art Therapy Licensure
Provided by Molly (Mary) K. Kometiani, MA, ATR-BC, LPCC
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Good morning Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the House Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today regarding House Bill 557 that establishes licensure for art therapy in Ohio. I also want to thank Representative Anielski as the primary sponsor for HB 557, Representative Antonio, Representative Barnes, and Representative Lepore-Hagan for being co-sponsors. My name is Molly Kometiani and I am a Registered and Board Certified Art Therapist with a Bachelor of Science in Art from Miami University and a Master's degree in Art Therapy and Counseling from Ursuline College. I am a resident of Canton and lifelong Ohioan. As President of the Buckeye Art Therapy Association (BATA), I am representing one of the oldest and largest state art therapy organizations in the country through my testimony this morning.

Art therapy is an established mental health profession that differs from other forms of traditional therapies, and it is that difference that makes it more effective in some cases. Art therapists use specific, proven, and chosen art media and images to assess, treat, and rehabilitate patients with physical, mental, emotional, and/or developmental disorders. The evidence-based practice of art therapy allows individuals to resolve struggles, enhance functioning, foster interpersonal skills, control behaviors, reduce stress, and improve self-esteem and personal awareness.ⁱ Experientially based and action-oriented, art making enhances verbal language by engaging the brain and body. Art therapy is a form of alternative communication for those who have an undeveloped vocabulary, who cannot provide articulation, or who avoid the unspeakable either permanently or temporarily.

In my career as a professional art therapist, I have witnessed and researched the use of art therapy as a universal language to represent diverse individuals and their worlds. Art therapy gives voice to one's inner self, provides connection, and builds communities in a non-threatening manner. These examples from my work demonstrate the healing power of art therapy:

- Art therapy made the impossible possible for Dereon. The 8-year-old was hospitalized frequently due to transverse myelitis diagnosis that left her paralyzed and without control over her life. Though her immobility did not allow her to paint like a typical artist with her hands, she revealed the patience and skill to move her neck while she held the paintbrush in her mouth to make colorful and expressive marks. Art therapy provides patients like Dereon an opportunity to experience a sense of control, feel supported and encouraged, develop a new sense of mastery over the effects of her medical diagnosis, and paint her dreams and hopes. Art therapy brought her family together as they offered her encouragement, recognized her strengths and ability, and shared in her creative vision.ⁱⁱ
- A family attending a hospice bereavement support group was grieving the death of its youngest member, a baby born with multiple congenital anomalies. Photographs were an important way for the family to remember him. The infant's 10 year-old sister created her favorite page in her scrapbook to include a note that wrote to him "[you're] the brother I always wanted." Art therapy

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provided an appealing and nonthreatening task integrating memoirs and loved ones' memorabilia through scrapbooking for the bereaved family including two young children. Organizing a loved one's life through scrapbooking honors and preserves memories as well assists a loved one in accepting their loss.ⁱⁱⁱ

- In my current work with female survivors of sex trafficking who often deal with substance and opioid addiction, art therapy group sessions increase connection, hope, strength, confidence and self-worth allowing for shame and guilt to become less burdensome. Art therapy creates an environment of empowerment where survivors can recapture the power from within and give them back their voice that has been silenced and ignored. Through this work, I have witnessed: a survivor express and process her exploitation for the first time; the lack of control revealed through metaphor as a survivor drew herself as a puppet being controlled by her trafficker; a survivor communicate feelings of being invisible, unheard, and ignored through painting a self-portrait of her lips sewn shut; a hopeful transition of a survivor's return to society through her disjointed puzzle representing her putting back together the pieces of her life.

As demonstrated in these examples, art therapy is able to provide various benefits and positively impact the lives of many. Right now licensure for art therapists is necessary to help provide treatment to vulnerable populations including individuals with opioid addictions, veterans and those suffering from the effects of trauma. HB 557 intends to:

- Expand access to art therapy services. Art therapists offer a vital health service option by providing efficient and effective assessment and treatment for at-risk individuals of all ages.
- Protect the public and improve mental health outcomes by prohibiting unqualified practitioners from advertising themselves as art therapists. The BATA board receives many concerns every year regarding professionals who are falsely advertising themselves as art therapists without the appropriate education and credentials. Vulnerable clients are put at risk when a clinician who does not have training in art therapy uses art materials and attempts to assess and interpret artwork. Without licensure, there is no repercussion to this.
- Decrease regulatory burden by not increasing the existing board members. The current board would receive suggestions from BATA leadership on licensure requirements and vote to implement those recommendations. Although there will be an increase in costs to provide art therapy licensure, initial licensure application and licensure renewal will provide fees; a fee structure will cover the administrative costs.

I also wanted to address these misconceptions raised from the submitted written opponent testimony:

- As evident from the education standards of the Accreditation Council for Art Therapy Education, art therapists are provided with comparable training to counselors and marriage and family therapists in the areas of diagnosis and treatment of mental and behavioral problems. In addition, art therapists are trained at the master's level, which entails 60 credit hours and 700 hours of practicum.
- Art therapy practice is very restricted without licensure. All of my art therapy employment has been grant funded or based solely on philanthropic funding. Licensure would safeguard the art therapy

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jobs in existence, as there is no guarantee that these jobs will endure without licensure. Ohio agencies such as hospices, rape crisis and domestic violence centers, and addiction facilities have all experienced reductions in their art therapy services. Art therapists in private practice bill insurance companies through supervisor billing, but a client's insurance may not accept this form of reimbursement making art therapy services a substantial expense that clients are unable to afford to pay out of pocket. Licensure will open the door for insurance reimbursement, thus helping to meet the needs of Ohioans.

In closing, I would like to ask you if think that Ohioans' mental health needs are being met with the therapeutic services available today? If you vote to pass HB 557, you are ensuring more qualified services for those in need- individuals addicted to substances/opioids, traumatized veterans and other survivors who are expected to come back home and live normal lives after witnessing unspeakable events, the medically fragile and their distressed families, and those facing significant losses who do not have support. Since entering this career 10 years ago, I have seen insurmountable pain, suffering, loss and challenges, but I have also seen art therapy heal by providing voice to those who cannot speak, families uniting over creating art together, burned out hospital staff experience respite, connection, and renewed focus upon returning to the workday,^{iv} and women who lost all sense of self through violence undergo significant restoration and recovery and experience a new sense of normal. HB 557 will provide art therapy licensure as a much-needed health services option for Ohio residents. Ohio citizens deserve access to the best help and the assurance that those facilitating art therapy are properly trained and licensed. HB 557 is the concrete and viable solution for a researched and documented problem that currently exists in our communities.

Thank you, Chairman Huffman and members of the House Health Committee, for your consideration for HB 557. I am happy to answer any questions.

ⁱ American Art Therapy Association. (2000, June). *About Art Therapy*. Retrieved from: <https://arttherapy.org/about-art-therapy/>

ⁱⁱ Holley, L.M., Kometiani, M.K. & Friebert, S. (2017). Expressive therapy and complementary approaches in palliative care. In K. Kobler & R. Limbo (Eds.), *Conversations in Perinatal, Neonatal & Pediatric Palliative Care* (pp. 87-107), Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kohut, M. (2011). Making art from memories: Honoring deceased loved ones through scrapbooking bereavement group. *Art Therapy* 28(3), 123-131.

^{iv} Kometiani, M.K. (2017). Creating a vital healing community: Pilot study for art therapy employee support group at pediatric hospital. *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 54, 122-127. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2017.04.012>

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