



National Association of Social Workers

Interested Party Testimony regarding HB 557 to license and regulate art therapists

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the House Health Committee, my name is Colleen Dempsey and I am the Practice Associate for the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

I am here today to offer NASW Ohio's perspective on House Bill 557 regarding the licensure of art therapists. NASW is the largest professional association representing interests of social workers in Ohio. As you may know, social workers currently make up the largest professional license type providing mental health services in the state of Ohio.

My organization has multiple concerns with this bill, though we would not want to construe this as a demonstration of opposition to the practice and use of art therapists to provide services. We are aware of the benefits of art therapy and support thoughtful, common sense regulations of mental health professionals. We agree that the licensure of art therapist a question worthy of attention as unlicensed and unregulated art therapists do have the potential to harm, just as other unlicensed and unregulated practitioners of mental health.

In previous iterations of this bill, we have been opposed to the stand-alone licensure of art therapists on grounds that art therapy is often better described as a therapy modality, and not a professional license type. At present, there is only one art therapy program in Ohio and it is a combined art therapy and counseling degree that permits graduates to earn their professional counseling licenses. We are most comfortable with this model, but understand that there remains a question of what to do with a professional who does not hold a degree in social work, professional counseling, etc.

There are many specialized therapies that current mental health practitioners may pursue including art therapy; dance therapy; drama therapy; music therapy; writing therapy; expressive arts therapy; sand play therapy; dream therapy; psychodrama; play therapy; movement therapy; authentic movement and yoga therapy. I personally a practitioner of animal-assisted therapy using horses. This practice requires extensive initial and continuing education in distinct practice models and philosophy. I now use animal-assisted therapy as a modality central to my social work practice, though I recognize that I would be a less effective practitioner if I had skipped my more generalist social work education and work experience.

NASW Ohio appreciates that there are national and state bodies working to standardize the competencies within art therapy. We continue to believe that art therapy is like other therapeutic specialties I just listed in which social workers and other mental health professionals currently pursue additional training to meet the needs of our clients. If art therapy becomes a standalone license, we are concerned that we will be opening the door for licenses for other expressive therapies, which may not be a sustainable. We worry that social workers will have to obtain and maintain multiple licenses to practice within their specialty, and that that will become financially burdensome.

We are also concerned that by licensing art therapy as a distinct profession, social workers who are not also licensed as art therapists would be barred from integrating art therapy practices into their work. The bill does contain a provision on line 1997 that exempts from licensure:

A person who holds a professional license in this state, or an employee who is supervised by a person who holds a professional license in this state, who engages in the practice of art therapy in

a manner that is incidental to the practice of the person's or employee's profession, if the person does not represent the person's or employee's self as an art therapist.

This is a crucial aspect of the legislation for our association and we are concerned that the current language will allow room for an interpretation of the word “incidental” and could effectively bar social workers from incorporating art into social work practice. For one example, I have not met a social worker who works with children and does not provide crayons and crafts to create a comforting and productive space for therapeutic work. We would prefer language that specifically exempts practitioners that hold other professional license types from requiring an art therapist license if that licensee is continuing to work within their respective scope of practice and professional ethics.

To be clear, NASW is no longer in opposition to the licensure of art therapists who pursue an educational program separate from a currently recognized path to licensure. We feel it is in the best interest of the public to have methods of holding these practitioners accountable to standard ethics and rules. We are concerned that use of the Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board as currently proposed will have a detrimental impact on social work licensure in the state. Of the three professional groups that the CSWMFT Board licenses, social workers are the largest by far, which means social workers are already supplementing the administrative costs for other license types. We are not convinced there are enough potential art therapy licensees to cover the cost of their own licensure administration, placing further burden on social work licensees to cover the new costs. NASW Ohio hopes that additional time and attention can be given to a discussion of the appropriate and capable regulatory body for this group of professionals. We would appreciate an interested party meeting to discuss this and other concerns with the proponents of this bill.

In summary, NASW Ohio Chapter is not opposed to the creation of a standalone licensure requirement for art therapists. We are hopeful that we will have an opportunity to work with the sponsor and proponents of the legislation to find a way to ensure public protection and methods of title protection for art therapists.

Thank You,

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