



Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer Cull and I have been a massage therapist for 21 years. I am currently the legislative chair for the American Massage Therapy Association – Ohio Chapter (AMTA-Ohio). I am joined with Melissa Ryan, who owns her own massage therapy practice that works closely with the VA to provide non-narcotic pain management to many veterans. Melissa also serves as the President for AMTA- Ohio.

With the exception of three states in the nation, ALL have since written legislation to regulate massage therapy and only those with those qualifications are permitted to practice massage therapy. Ohio is the ONLY state that permits both licensed and unlicensed individuals to massage. The lack of education, oversight or accountability from any regulatory body, and protection of the public are, obviously, some inherent problems with this model in Ohio.

In Ohio, we are proud of our relationship with The State Medical Board of Ohio, the entity that regulates our profession, and carry that as a badge of honor. In order to apply for licensure with the state, we must complete many hours in Anatomy and Physiology, massage theory and practicum, business, and ethics. Furthermore, we must complete an FBI & State background check

The student in massage therapy school must pass a near-national exam called the Massage and Bodywork Licensing Exam (MBLEx). If a person lacks education, then, they have failed to be able to prove their competency in massage therapy at all. How do we know that they have the knowledge, skills, or ethical values in order to provide a safe treatment for the people on their tables?

Unfortunately, Ohio has several pressing issues that pose a threat to our residents. The reason for regulation is to provide protection to the public. We have vulnerable people in the state going for massage, unknowingly, putting their physical health at risk by being under the hands of an untrained person, a person that has failed to show their competency in education, including contraindications and ethics.

As a massage therapy instructor, I have seen all too many times a person signs up for massage therapy school, drops out, and begins practicing massage anyway, calling it relaxation - which is the loophole Ohioans face with our current system. Even in one case a dropout student used a picture from the school classroom as their advertisement for massage. People were unaware that this person had not finished massage school, did not have the knowledge and skills necessary, and risking the welfare of the person on the table.

The State Medical Board has also told us that massage therapists are the only licensee under the medical board that they perpetually have a problem with not showing up for hearings, why? Because, unfortunately, even if they lose their license, they can continue to practice massage without a license, even though they have been found by the medical board to be incompetent to do so.

Every massage that is given by a licensed massage therapist draws on our medical and clinical knowledge of the body, pathology of conditions and diseases, physiological effects of massage, positioning of the patient on the table, and ethics, regardless of the goals of the client. For the client that wants 'relaxation', we must know their medical history in order to provide a safe massage, even for a stress reducing massage. Stress itself is a medical diagnosis that is coded with a diagnostic ICD-10 code. So, even those without a license, are practicing medicine with their relaxation massages because every technique and touch done is intellectual touch. The patient that is or has congestive heart failure, high blood pressure, PTSD, anxiety, low back pain, surgery, taking medications, or unexplained muscle pain is who we see, just to name a few of the conditions. Each of these conditions require a background and proven competency in education to set up an effectively safe session, even if their outcome goal is relaxation.

Ohio has one of the highest national rates of human trafficking and what we are sure of is the number one location for human trafficking can be found in 'massage parlors', performed by 'masseuses' in Ohio.

Both terms are antiquated and have since been co-opted by prostitution; however, the public is unaware. They see massage and are either, willingly, or unwillingly, supporting human trafficking when they visit these locations. Often the locations of these massage parlors are in place, often within shopping centers or shopping strips.

With the passing of our bill, the proper authorities will now have the tools they need to investigate a suspected location without the long, drawn-out process that is current practice. With the passing of this bill, the State Medical Board of Ohio will have the authority to act on complaints for those that practice without a license.

I ask you to move SB 55 from your prestigious committee to the Senate floor where it may be voted on. Make a difference and give the tools necessary for those fighting human trafficking. As a massage therapist, I shutter every time a client acts inappropriate because they thought I would be one of those masseuses to give them a happy ending. As massage therapists, we are perpetually at risk of having a client solicit us, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. By passing this bill, you will also help over 12,000 therapists in the state to educate the public that we are healthcare and not sex workers. Massage therapy and prostitution are not any relation to one another.

Thank you very much for your time and I thank you in advance for considering moving Senate Bill 55 out from committee.