

Konrad Jackson

From: Rebecca <rebecca.albert@starband.net>
Sent: Sunday, March 09, 2014 10:31 PM
To: Rep. Kurt Olson
Subject: massage legislation

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Dear Representative Olson,

My name is Rebecca Albert. I am a practicing massage therapist and sole proprietor of A Dance of Hands Massage in Juneau. In this capacity, I have worked for a day spa, a bed and breakfast, a chiropractic office and for the past five years from my own aforementioned business. I have practiced massage therapy exclusively since 2004 and part-time prior to that since graduating in 1995 from the School of Integrating Massage Therapy in Fairbanks, AK.

My calendar has been booked for a few weeks and I've been unable to easily reschedule my regular clients to clear working hours to attend legislative hearings and meetings. Though I've participated in coalition meetings and gotten on mailing lists, somehow I was missed, as were most of my colleagues; I know only TWO massage therapists in Juneau who received the survey distributed by AMTA. The survey results do not offer adequate reflection of myself or most of the therapists I know as we had no opportunity to respond because we never received it.

My concerns for the bill:

Serve, not hinder Alaskan Massage Therapists My desire is that any legislation for massage is written to serve all Alaskan therapists well. I don't know exactly how licensing will impact my practice in Juneau in the short and long term outside of increasing my costs and perhaps dictating how often I take continuing education workshops. I love continuing education for massage. I travel for classes when I can and have brought a few instructors over the years to teach in Juneau; in fact am bringing Dr James Mally up next month to teach two workshops. I don't like the idea of being told what to take or when to take it however.

Insurance It seems a popular reason for licensing is to bill insurance; I have no desire to bill insurance for my clients now or in the future. I have worked in medical offices and had to deal with the constant battle with insurance companies to pay for visits. It is a stressful and expensive struggle. I prefer to keep my rates reasonable and affordable and keep stress away from my office.

Cost Alaska is a geographically expansive state where travel is particularly expensive and sometimes weather dependent. Many therapists work in rural and remote locations and my concerns are that the financial costs will put them out of business and deprive their communities of massage care. From a fellow therapist: “I had my own massage business when we first came back to Naknek but the cost of utilities makes it almost impossible. The cost of ceu's, insurance, and travel eat up my profit. With added fees it's just not worth my time. The economy out here can't really handle higher fees. The legislation might run me out of the massage business.”

I have heard that the start up fee would be around \$460. I don't know if start up fee is indicative of annual or biennial licensing board fees but this is a significant chunk of change to submit regularly on top of insurance/professional dues and CEU fees and associated costs. We'll have to raise our rates accordingly which will undoubtedly impact our business; we might lose clients who can no longer afford our services. I understand HB 187 will address rising costs of licensing fees, but the concern is for providing legislation that is not restrictive to the point of preventing the practice of massage therapy in rural and remote communities in Alaska. If some therapists can no longer afford to practice and drop out of the profession, this will raise costs for the rest of us, that is why it is in our interest to be inclusive and accommodating to all. After all, this effort is to create a state law, not a national one; let's honor Alaska and her unique circumstances.

Apprenticeship I have received massage regularly for years from a massage therapist friend who has a successful practice and many happy clients, whose initial training was via apprenticeship. I don't see that the bill as written offers allowance for this type of training. There are other states providing regulation for massage apprenticeship including Hawaii, Utah and Florida. There is no guarantee that loosely defined or no legislation in this regard will be remedied by a Board further down the road. Alaska would particularly benefit from the allowance for this type of training.

Value Ralph Stephens (internationally recognized instructor and author, an Iowa and a New Mexico Licensed Massage Therapist, past chair of the Iowa Board of Massage Therapy Examiners, and a 2008 Inductee in the Massage Therapy Hall of Fame) addresses several issues around raising required education hours for massage therapy that I find interesting and relative to legislation requirements, including compensation for increased costs:

“Are hospitals, chiropractors, clinics, spas and cruise ships going to raise the compensation paid to massage therapists because they have more hours of training? Will the public pay 50% more for massage because the therapist has, say 750 hours instead of 500? Will the marketplace support increased prices for massage? The real-world perspective is a resounding "NO.”

One might think the public would benefit from a better, more consistent massage delivered, but more training hours in and of themselves do not a better therapist make. I can attest to that as I have received massage from the 2,000-hour wonders in Canada. My most disappointing massage experiences have been in Canada. I am sure there are great therapists north of the border but they are no more common than here in the U.S.

Some are just positive that if we raise our hours, then we will be accepted by mainstream healthcare. If history is any indication of how that works, there is clear evidence that an increase of few hundred hours is not going to open any doors. The medical establishment is not about to let in any practitioner group that does not have a rigorous college-level training requirements.

Case in point: the nursing field is on track to eliminate traditional diploma-level programs in hospitals and community colleges and require a bachelor's degree for all registered nurses. By 2015, the entry-level credential required to become a physical therapist will be a doctoral degree! If they won't hire nurses without a bachelor's, are they going to hire high school grads who finish massage school with even 900 or 1200 hours? Maybe – but only at a level comparable to CNA's or physical therapy assistants. Is working at the lowest levels of the medical pecking order an upgrade?"

Here's the link to the full article: http://www.massagetoday.com/mpacms/mt/column.php?c_id=627

Some regulation might be a positive thing, though I would have it simplified to address a national standard of health and safety factors, training and ethical principles while accommodating circumstances particular to the unique details of Alaska. I feel this legislation is excessive in detail, complication and expense. I personally am torn regarding legislation for Alaska. I do want recognition and credibility. I don't however know that the costs are worth it.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of my views.

Yours in health,

Rebecca

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