



## **TLC Massage Therapy**

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I appeal to you for your support of a Concurrent Resolution to disallow Executive Order 127, which seeks to dissolve the Alaska Board of Massage and refer its duties to the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, Division of Corporations, Professional and Business Licensing. I believe this will lead to decreased efficiency by Division staff, increased licensing fees and little to no oversight of those who work with the Massage program and will remove Legislative Audits that identify issues with the Division and the Board. Programs will no longer be open to legislative oversight.

Massage Licensing, through its regulations, ensures an educated Therapist, creates safe spaces for Clients and Patients and works in the best interest of Public Safety and Protection. A Regulatory Board is tasked with creating Scope of Practice, Ethics and Regulations. This Board has approved more than 1600 licenses for legitimate therapists who have completed educational programs within and outside of the State of Alaska. Likewise, the Board has denied licensing to applicants who submit fraudulent applications or have engaged in prostitution as identified by their National Background Check, and/or seek to continue trafficking and prostitution in our great state. If this Executive order is allowed to become law our program loses Oversight, Advocacy and Accountability. I cannot see how this move will increase efficiency or keep licensing fees in check for your constituents.

### Oversight –

A lack of oversight by Board members may result in fraudulent applications rubber stamped during the application process. Board members, through training and research, possess the ability to identify fraud and schools that haven't been verified as approved institutions but are used as a front for human trafficking. Hastily or incorrectly processed applications can lead to increased costs of Investigations and legal fees due to increased complaints should a practice of illicit massage be approved by an untrained eye and need to be Revoked later. Lack of oversight can also mean legitimate applications are delayed or denied Licensure due to lack of staff available to programs. Applications can stall due to lack of time to contact applicants for more information. Outreach to institutions and states with reciprocity will be necessary in house as opposed to having a Board Member answer questions quickly because the already have done the legwork or make calls themselves. Being a Self-Funded program, licensees will see fees increase across the board due to a need for increased staff dedicated to our program.

Board members are volunteers and receive no compensation for their service. They are committed to Public Protection by researching and staying abreast of changes in their field. Board members lend their expertise and train peers with historical knowledge gained by being seated on a Board. Board members are trained to identify fraudulent applicants and deny applications seeking to place Sex Trafficked individuals in our state. This knowledge serves the interest of Public Safety while costing little to the Program.

High Turnover of CPBL Division Staff leads to processing delays, lack of historical knowledge of the program and increased costs of Specialized Training for new employees. This turnover has led to an inefficient process and frustrated licensees. The Board was created in 2015; they have had 9 Occupational Licensing Examiners oversee the program. Each Examiner has required training and oversight by Supervisors. Difficulty hiring

and retaining full time employees has led to a backlog of applications and lack of knowledge of our program. Should Executive Order 127 be allowed to become law, licensees and applicants lose their direct line of support by a Board that has their best interest in mind. State Employees may not gain the same passion for our program nor stay long enough to become invested in the work.

Accountability -

Board members oversee many aspects of Licensing, including viewing Financials as they pertain to Massage Licensing. The Board has the opportunity to have a Finance Officer present to the Board quarterly. The board is able to ask questions about expenses, most importantly, a Division-suggested increase in Licensing Fees. The Board of massage has successfully advocated to keep licensing fees stable in several instances.

A Legislative Audit Committee audits the Division and the Board's activities when a Sunset comes due. The Board has received positive feedback from the Legislative Audit committee on both occasions (2017 & 2023). Should this Board be dissolved, this licensing program will no longer be audited will not be visible to the Legislature. Missteps have been identified by this committee and have been rectified. Had there been no audit, many things would have gone unnoticed.

Advocacy -

Board members engage in countless volunteer hours of research, outreach to peer states and organizations and attend conferences to gain knowledge and stay abreast of changes in, and threats to, our profession all at their own cost or reimbursable expenses. Should the Executive Order become law this would no longer happen. OLEs will need to reach out to an Licensee for expertise. In this case, the Department would need to pay Massage therapists for this expertise at current fees set by the therapist.

This is a young board which has educated administrators and the public over the past eight years what it means to be a Licensed Massage Therapist. There are many misunderstandings about our profession and we have sought to educate anyone and everyone about the health benefits of massage. We would like to continue that education in the interest of public protection and keep our friends and licensees safe as well while they do their good work.

Thank you for your consideration.