

January 31, 2024

The Honorable Jesse Bjorkman
Alaska State Senate
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street, Room 3
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Senator Bjorkman,

The Alaska Board of Massage Therapists, in response to the Executive Order issued by Governor Dunleavy **on January 16, 2024**, in a unanimous decision, **URGENTLY REQUESTS IMMEDIATE ACTION** to halt this elimination of the board.

Governor Dunleavy calls for this order to pass **on March 15, 2024**, without action taken by a majority vote of the legislature. His reason for transferring responsibility to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development is for the efficiency of administration. We would like you to consider vital elements for retention of the Alaska Board of Massage Therapists.

1. Efficiency

- a. Upon receiving a completed application for licensure of massage therapy, the board reviews only applications that are initial issuances of massage licenses from states that do not have substantially equal to or greater than the requirements of the State of Alaska; applications that are reinstatements; applications that have a "yes" answer to the fitness to practice questions; and applications from any school in Alaska that has not yet proven quality education due to lack of years in business.
- b. In the past two years, the Board of Massage Therapists made several aggressive changes to make more efficient use of time and resources: allowing the division to pre-approve applications that came from other states with substantially equivalent or greater than requirements of Alaska, removing a curriculum breakdown; allowing for the background check's return after industry professional review; and abiding with the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act enacted in January 2023
- c. The time of licensure approval for those applications that must pass through the Board of Massage Therapists is typically 5-7 business days. Massage therapy is a healthcare profession. When comparing the efficiency of response to an application, one should compare it with responses for licensure of other healthcare professions, including doctors, nurses, dentists, and physical therapists. These professions must protect the public's safety by awarding only qualified professionals a license. Having multiple qualified peers review applications and continuing education certificates in an audit allows for a greater chance of catching discriminating factors in the application.

2. Public Safety

- a. The massage profession is a healthcare profession that has a misunderstood purpose. Some therapists choose to align practices in doctors' and other medical offices, some choose spa, travel, or in-home business practices. Patrons often look for services that are illicit in nature with those businesses which are not attached to a medical setting. Sex workers migrate to this profession as a cover for prostitution. It is also an open door for human trafficking left unchecked by a division that has only one person staffed in the massage therapy profession.
- b. As a point of interest, Governor Dunleavy created a council on human and sex trafficking. Listed as per the website, <https://dps.alaska.gov/CHST/Home> the background and purpose lists illicit massage parlors as a place where individuals are exploited. We appreciate the stand against human trafficking and prostitution. This is a step in the right direction. It would benefit from interaction with the Alaska Board of Massage Therapists, nor any other non-profit organization which holds the massage therapy industry as a potential for this occurrence. AMTA (American Massage Therapy Association) is an organization that backs the massage therapy profession in its regard for the safety of all people, licensed or patron. Without industry professionals to look over applications, reinstatements, verifying massage school accreditation, Alaska is throwing its arms open wide and welcoming the illicit businesses to control and destroy the professionalism of this dynamic healthcare industry. It will cause decreased economy in the massage therapy field as well as causing a regression of recognition from insurance companies as a justifiable means of treatment for many scientifically proven benefits.

3. Financial Burden

- a. The financial burden of the current Board of Massage Therapists has significantly decreased with the increased use of Zoom for three of the four quarterly meetings, only gathering for one meeting each year in person. The single meeting in person provides clarity in communication and an open Town Hall for the licensees to assemble and communicate their concerns and appreciation of the state of the industry.
- b. Professional board training for the massage industry is available through a Non-Profit Organization. When a representative from the Alaska Board of Massage Therapists attends this meeting, the non-profit organization pays for travel, room, and meals. It provides opportunities for education concerning challenges in the massage licensing practice and collaboration of states for understanding the navigation of new ideas and efficiencies without recreating the wheel. There are updates in the world of human trafficking and helpful ways to see indications of "diploma mills" and false addresses known in the U.S. as linked to rings of human traffickers. The State of Alaska pays for none of this dedicated education for the representative. Additionally, the Department of Commerce just finished recording

training for board members that is readily available for new board members. This will cost the board nothing.

- c. There will be the need to obtain and pay massage therapists as industry professional review for investigative matters should the professional licensing division take on all the responsibilities.
- d. Without volunteers who spend time reviewing matters, keeping up to date with challenges with education and testing in the industry and dangers of illegal activities across the U.S. can quickly increase Alaska's threat of infiltration by prostitution and human trafficking. This threat of criminal activity could cost the state much more than keeping a volunteer board, which already exists and desires the best for the industry while trying to streamline the process for those who qualify to receive their licenses without delay.

Thank you for your time in service to our state. We know and understand the challenges of making big decisions that impact our world. Please consider bringing this matter before your colleagues so they can take action before the time expires.

Respectfully,
Annetta Atwell LMT,
Chair, Alaska Board of Massage Therapists
On behalf of the Alaska Board of Massage Therapists

Kelli Shew LMT
Julie Endle public representative
Emily Foster LMT