

May 8, 2024

Thank you, Honorable Representatives Edgmon, Foster, and Johnson, committee members.

My name is Annetta Atwell. I am the Chair of the Board of Massage Therapists. I am in Fairbanks, Alaska.

We are here to talk about the reasons the board of massage therapists are pursuing extension of the board's existence based on the sunset bill.

When addressing the areas of concern stated by legislative auditor Kris Curtis, there were four areas she identified that should be corrected during the following six years. Three of the items of concern are to be borne by CBPL. Hiring more staff, creating incentives to retain new staff members, and working to make sure applications are processed and approved before they become stale.

The fourth item is a joint concern both for the state and the board of massage therapists. This has been a topic that the board has addressed, keeping the topic in the public's awareness over the past six months. The adjustment of the licensing fees is suggested to be raised to the appropriate rate to keep the board from incurring additional debt.

The Governor issued a stay of fee increases during the pandemic and has protected that licensees from an overtaxing of funds during such uncertain times. That time has come to an end and the relief from the government aid for this purpose. We licensees appreciate the hold on the increase.

The board will work hand in hand with the state to establish and ensure fees are justified for the correct spending. We, the board of massage therapists, understand that the increase will happen around the end of this year. The only way the fees will not be increased is if the SB 225/HB 314 is passed, moving the expense of investigations away from the licensing fees.

The board of massage therapists will continue to meet quarterly. We will meet yearly in Anchorage to provide a town hall meeting for our constituents. We will continue to pursue our diligent process of guarding our profession from those who would taint it with human trafficking and prostitution rings.

Beginning with the process of recognizing clues to applications that should cause alarms, we also provide expert understanding of our profession when reviewing investigations for reasons of unlicensed activity to abuse of the profession in any capacity, including sexual misconduct by a licensee. We strive to be educated in signs of human trafficking with additional training from outside entities that work specifically in exposing these illicit businesses.

I am currently working with Director Robb to establish communication of the needs of the board from the state for optimal support. Since this position is still only three months in my hands, I'm learning the expectations of a chair.

I have spoken with Director Robb about a list of items that I believe will help me become more aware of needs in leading this board as efficiently as possible. One item that I have asked for Director Robb assistance is to identify key staff members with whom I should have contact.

I am also pursuing communication with other committees that we should be working alongside to make sure we are looking at education requirements of our applicants, continuing education of licensees and possible overlap with occupations that parallel our scope of practice: items to help our board provide clear direction in each of these areas. Speaking of scope of practice, we are addressing statutes and regulations concerning our scope of practice at our June quarterly meeting.

Thank you for your time.

**Annetta Atwell Testimony
050824 Chair, Board of Massage
Therapy**