

Statement in Support of SB 255 Art Therapy License

by

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House Committee on Health Care
Salem, Oregon

February 27, 2017

My name is Mary Andrus and I am the Program Director of the Art Therapy Counseling Program at Marylhurst University, the only accredited training program of art therapists in the state of Oregon. We have been training students for 30 years and our students serve some of the most vulnerable and underserved populations in the state. I have been spearheading this licensure effort in the state.

I am the former President of the Illinois Art Therapy Association and a proud and active member of the American Art Therapy Association, a group that includes 5,500 practitioners, educators and researchers engaged in the art therapy profession. The Association has closely worked in concert with the Oregon Art Therapy Licensure Task Force and 42 other state and regional chapters to promote the highest standards of art therapy practice to the public. There is a high prevalence of mental health problems in Oregon, where we were ranked 49th in providing adequate treatment to those in need of services. In Oregon, we have over 150 credentialed art therapists providing treatment to needed populations, many of which graduated from our program at Marylhurst.

Our field is evolving and growing. We are working to develop credibility and recognition. In order to practice art therapy, Master's level training is required to practice. I soon will be completing my Doctorate in Art Therapy, I see this bill as a step toward creating a level of professional practice, protecting the public and helping our field be viewed as a profession and not a technique.

It is my privilege to appear before the Committee to express the University's strong support for SB 255, the Art Therapist Licensing Bill, and to urge its adoption by the Senate Committee on Human Services. The Bill works with the Health Licensing Office to protect the health and safety of citizens of Oregon through licensure of professional art therapists and regulation of the practice of art therapy.

I would like to thank the Committee's Chair, Senator Sara Gelser and Vice Chair, Senator Alan Olsen, for holding today's hearing. I also want to express our appreciation to Representative Parrish and Senator Dembrow for co-sponsoring this needed legislation.

The Art Therapy Profession

Art therapy is a distinct mental health and behavioral science discipline that combines knowledge of human development, psychological theories and counseling techniques with training in visual arts and the creative process to provide a unique approach for helping clients improve psychological health, cognitive abilities, and sensory-motor functions. Art therapy uniquely provides a means of communicating for those who cannot find the words to express anxiety, pain or emotions as a result of trauma, combat, physical abuse, loss of brain function, depression, and other debilitating conditions.

Credentialed art therapists work in a wide variety of medical, mental health, rehabilitative, educational, correctional, and other community settings in Oregon and across the country. Art therapy is integrated in comprehensive treatment plans administered by individual art therapists, or by art therapists as part of interdisciplinary teams where art therapy complements and informs the work of other medical, mental health and allied health professionals.

Art therapy uniquely offers an effective treatment for people of all ages and backgrounds who experience developmental, health, learning and psychological impairment. As noted by the Office of Science Education of the National Institutes of Health, “art therapy is becoming more prevalent as a parallel and supportive therapy for almost any medical condition.”

Requirements for professional entry into the practice of art therapy include, at a minimum, a master’s degree and extensive post-graduate clinical experience under the supervision of credentialed art therapists—a process which typically requires a minimum of four years. Following completion of a master’s degree, graduates must complete at least 1000 hours of supervised direct client contact to qualify for the ATR credential awarded by the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB), and must pass the national ATCB examination to hold national board certification (ATR-BC). All credentialed art therapists must commit to adhere to the legal and ethical standards of the ATCB’s Code of Professional Practice, and to maintain their credential with required continuing education. At Marylhurst we dually train our students to be eligible to meet the requirements for both ATR and their license as a professional counselor. Registered art therapists are required to meet 100 hours of continuing education every 5 years to keep their credentials active.

The unique study and practice of art therapy require that practitioners be trained within approved art therapy master’s degree programs recognized by the American Art Therapy Association. The association has approved 35 art therapy degree programs at accredited colleges and universities, including Marylhurst University in Lake Oswego, and 5 programs in the neighboring states, 1 in Washington, and 4 in California.

The Need for Licensure of Art Therapists

The unique training and practice of art therapy, together with its broad application in diverse institutional and community settings, make it imperative that the public be made aware of what therapy is, understand the requirements for effective and safe practice of art therapy, and be protected from individuals seeking to perform art therapy services without appropriate training.

The potential for public harm in art therapy derives from the unique training and competencies required for effective and safe practice. In addition to training in psychology and therapeutic skills, art therapy students must understand the science of imagery and of color, texture, and art media, and how each can affect a wide range of potential clients, personalities and emotional disorders. They must know how each media, color or texture can calm or bring closure to a client or, if used inappropriately, how they can further frustrate a client rather than help them find their voice.

In practice, qualified art therapists use distinctive art-based assessments to evaluate emotional, cognitive and developmental conditions. They must make parallel assessments of a client's general psychological disposition and how art as a process is likely to interact with the each individual's mental state and corresponding behavior. Understanding how art interacts with a client's psychological disposition, and how to safely interpret and manage the reactions different art processes can evoke, are competencies that are only gained through substantial experiential learning that is unique to art therapy.

Qualified art therapists understand the power of art and art-making to unlock memories and reveal emotions. Use of art therapy methods or art materials thus carries significant risk to the emotional stability of clients if applied by individuals lacking appropriate training. Potential risks from unqualified practice of art therapy include misinterpreting or ignoring assessments the practitioner has not been clinically trained to diagnose or treat, eliciting adverse responses from clients they are not properly trained to manage or treat, and delaying appropriate therapeutic treatment that

adds unnecessary anguish and cost for clients and their families. And this potential for harm is magnified where a client has a vulnerable psychological predisposition.

Public confusion about art therapy and risk of potential harm from unqualified practitioners have increased with growing numbers of online and university-based programs that claim to provide degrees and certificate training in areas that sound very much like art therapy. These programs typically require minimal on-site coursework or online self-instruction courses that do not include anything approaching the rigorous coursework, supervised clinical training and national credentialing required of professional art therapists.

Enhancing Public Safety and Accountability

Through its coursework standards, educational program approval, professional credentialing, and continuing education programs, the art therapy profession has been able to assure the public of initial and continuing high levels of professional training and competence. The American Art Therapy Association is working to enhance these protections---

- With new academic standards and program requirements that require the highest levels of clinical training and competencies;
- With promotion of uniform standards and requirements for state licensure that meet or exceed those of all mental health professions currently licensed in Oregon: and
- With independent accreditation of art therapy master's degree programs beginning in 2016 through the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP).

However, improved academic standards, professional credentialing, and program accreditation are insufficient in themselves to address the potential for public harm I have described. Licensure is

clearly needed to define the appropriate scope of practice of art therapy in Oregon, to promote competent, effective and safe practice of art therapy, and to assure the public that appropriate art therapy services are provided only by clinically trained and qualified professional art therapists.

HB2432 has strong bipartisan support in both the Senate and House. The American Art Therapy Association, and Marylhurst University respectfully request that the House Committee on Health Care approve this important and needed legislation.