

Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

Bill # SB766- Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists- Music Therapists Act

Hearing Date: 2/26/20

Testimony: Niki Runge, MCAT, MT-BC

Chairman Pinsky and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, my name is Niki Runge, and I am a Board Certified Music Therapist and owner of Chesapeake Music Therapy, a private music therapy practice serving individuals on the eastern shore from early childhood through adulthood with severe mental health needs, physical/neurological and developmental disabilities, and autism in schools, day programs, group homes and private clinic space. I am also a per diem music therapist with Coastal Hospice, where I serve pediatric and adult hospice patients, as well as provide bereavement music therapy to children, youth and those with special needs. Last year, I served over 500 clients. I am also the Government Relations Chair for the Maryland Association for Music Therapy and the Co-Chair for the Maryland Music Therapy State Task Force for Occupational Regulation.

Maryland has approximately 140 Board Certified Music Therapists providing services to over 20,000 Maryland residents each year. We work with people from the cradle to the grave and every age in between. In Maryland, some well-known places that employ music therapists are Kennedy Krieger Institute, Johns Hopkins Medical Center, Clifton T. Perkins and Springfield Hospital Centers, Coastal and Seasons Hospice and Maryland School for the Blind.

As a private music therapy practitioner, I have seen first-hand how music therapy has helped give a voice to at-risk youth through songwriting, helped bring peace to broken families through family improvisations, create opportunities for social interaction for those with autism through instrument play, increase access to the arts through sensory-friendly concerts, help children disenfranchised by homelessness feel pride and a connection to their community through participation in a handbell choir, increase the daily functioning of people with severe intellectual and neurological disabilities through singing and provide comfort to those who at the end of life or grieving the loss of a loved one through musical life review.

I have also witnessed incidents of confusion regarding the difference between professional music therapy services and general use of music in healthcare and education, misrepresentation of music activities as music therapy, difficulty accessing music therapy services by families and examples of harm. Recently, a client of mine told me that she accepted what she thought were services by a music therapist for her child in the NICU but came to find out later that that particular hospital did not employ nor contract with a board certified music therapist. She agreed to accepting services because I was seeing her other child, and a staff person in the NICU offered her "music therapy". There is actually specialized training for music therapists to earn the designation as a NICU Music Therapists that includes evidence-based interventions and supervised experience in clinical settings.

I have seen a young autistic boy whose parents were seeking treatment for an adverse reaction he was having to singing due to another individual attempting to gain his attention through singing in his face. This had impacted the family to the extent that no one could sing near the boy without him becoming violent. I am happy to report that through music therapy interventions the family is now able to worship together at their local church.

Although music therapy is recognized as a related service under federal education law, Maryland special education students have not been able to access music therapy services because the state does not recognize the music therapy board certification.

As my practice needed to expand to serve the underserved eastern shore, I needed to look to neighboring Delaware to hire another music therapist. Licensure will encourage out-of-state students to return to Maryland to fill and create jobs serving Marylanders.

In summary, the music therapy community in Maryland is committed to providing quality services to Marylanders. We believe that SB 766 will insure that consumers are protected and provide better access to effective music therapy services from qualified providers.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today and for your support of this legislation.