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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 220- Health Occupations – State Board of Massage Therapy Examiners – Requiring
License to Practice and Other Revisions
February 1, 2022**

Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 220, which will convert Maryland from a two-tier to a single-tier license for massage therapists with an emphasis on a strong educational requirement in addition to hands-on training hours. Maryland is the only state with bifurcated licensing with two categories of licensees: Registered Massage Therapists (RMT) and Licensed Massage Practitioners (LMT).

Maryland is also the only state which requires a college degree to become a licensed massage therapist. HB 220 eliminates this requirement while simultaneously increasing the required educational hours from 600 to 750 which will provide for a robust and complete entry-level education. The national average for entry-level massage practice hovers around 650 hours while an associate's degree adds at least 900 hours of additional educational requirements.

The single-tier system will provide more equity for future massage therapists to be able to attend a trade school or community college program with no further burden of time or expense for college credits. This seems reasonable as the industry has a median income of \$29,000 (2020 AMTA) and of particular note, the change will open up opportunities to serve on the Maryland Board of Massage Therapy Examiners, as currently, one must be an LMT, barring over 1500 RMPs from eligibility.

The bill also creates additional opportunities that will solve employment disparities that exist under current law. RMPs have not been allowed to work in health care settings such as chiropractor's offices even when they had the same education, and often more advanced training

and experience than an LMT. There is evidence that this has depressed the income opportunities for RMPs.

Maryland's arcane licensing standards have also made portability into the state difficult and confusing, which is another barrier for the general public and military spouses for employment as massage therapists. Like so many other industries, we have seen a reduction in the workforce (15-20%) with open job opportunities at almost all massage businesses and nobody to fill them.

The Massage Board has provided a preliminary roadmap for the regulations that will convert current RMPS to LMT status over the next few years. What they have provided is fair and balanced and would not create an additional burden of time or expense on any current RMP in the process. Both the State Board of Massage Therapists and the American Massage Therapy Association, with the strong support of their membership, are here united in support of this change.

Finally, HB 220 also allows the Board to maintain an electronic roster of all professionals certified by the Board, eliminating the issuance of paper licenses. Switching to an electronic roster will increase efficiencies for the Board while saving staff time, money, and space. Further, licensees will be able to access their license and certificate numbers quickly and electronic online verification will not have a supplemental cost to licensees or the Department of Health. Licensees without access to the Board's website will still be able to contact the Board to verify a license and receive paper certificates. Electronic rosters and administrative functions are being effectively used on several Health Occupational Boards and should be made available for the Board of Massage Therapy Examiners as well.

The benefits of massage therapy are readily apparent to anyone who has received a good massage, and a growing body of scientific evidence proves its effectiveness for the treatment of anxiety, digestive disorders, sports injuries, and back pain. We should strive to improve the practice of massage therapy for the safety of Maryland consumers. I urge a favorable report of this legislation.