

Testimony in opposition to HB0374/SB0370

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for himself and as a member of the **American Organization for Bodywork Therapies of Asia (AOBTA)**

Dear Senators and Delegates:

I come before you as **one of the people who would be criminalized by HB 374 / SB 370** now before the Senate finance committee and the House health committee. This bill would outlaw the practice of Asian Bodywork therapy (“manual therapies” performed along the “principles of East Asian medical theories and practices”) without an acupuncture license.

I am a 2004 graduate of the **Shiatsu and Asian Bodywork** program at the Baltimore School of Massage. I am **nationally certified** as a Diplomate in Asian Bodywork Therapy by the NCCAOM (recently renamed to the NCBAHM), an AOBTA Certified Practitioner, and a **Maryland Licensed Massage Therapist**.

I have practiced massage therapy and Asian Bodywork Therapy (ABT) for over 20 years.

I am a member of the **faculty of the Potomac Massage Training Institute**, where I have taught fundamentals of ABT to massage therapy students. (I’m scheduled to teach there later this month, but now I’ll have to warn students that this may become **forbidden knowledge!**)

And I am a member of the **medical staff of Mercy Hospital**, where I work with cancer and other chemotherapy patients using massage and Asian Bodywork therapy.

Indeed, just a few hours before I learned about this bill, I learned of the death of a patient I had been working with for over three years. I reflected on how I was there when she got the bad news about cancer infiltrating her brain, **how I tried to take away some small part of the grief and pain with my hands**, marveled at her strength as she made plans to continue the fight with radiation treatment. She was a strong advocate for the work I did there, **telling the head of the oncology department to make sure I was able to continue** to work with her.

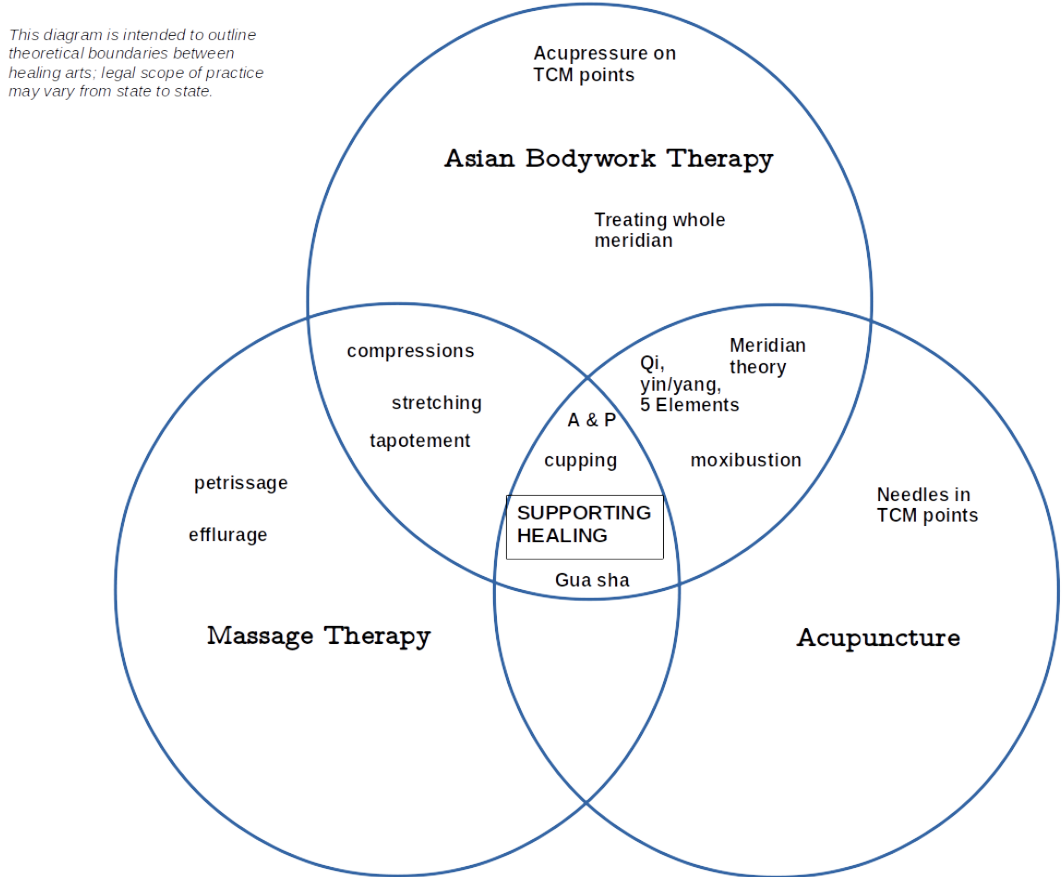
This bill proposes to incarcerate me if I continue such work.

My training at BSOM, and subsequent decades of continuing education, includes the theories of traditional East Asian Medicine, and manual therapies rooted in them, including shiatsu, acupressure, tui na, moxibustion, gua sha, and cupping.

Many of my teachers were practitioners of acupuncture as well as of Asian Bodywork therapy. I regard acupuncturists as colleagues, and have several times attended continuing education events put on by the Maryland Acupuncture Society.

I am therefore shocked and dismayed to see an attempt, apparently originating with the acupuncture board, to **destroy the practice of Asian Bodywork Therapy in Maryland** -- when some of us ABTs are certified by the same national board that certifies acupuncturists!

ABT is a distinct practice and profession from acupuncture. While we share a theoretical basis, the application is different – with shiatsu, for example, we treat an entire "meridian", while acupuncturists can only treat individual points. The theories, scopes of practice, and therapeutic methods of acupuncture, massage therapy, and ABT overlap – as do the theories, scopes of practice, and therapeutic methods of many healthcare professions.



Some ABT techniques fall under the legal definition of massage therapy in Maryland, and most Asian Bodywork therapists obtain **massage therapy licensure** to make use of them. Some use only static point acupressure, which is (properly) exempted from state massage regulation as it poses no risk to the public. **Point acupressure is an ancient folk medicine** that people have been doing for millennia. Indeed as a historical matter, acupressure was here first -- people figured out to press an acupoint long before they decided to stick a needle in one.

One can learn simple basic acupressure for self and family care out of a book. I routinely give clients simple self-care instructions. But acupressure can also be a much more complete and complex system. For example, psychotherapist Iona Marsaa Teeguarden developed the Jin Shin Do acupressure system in the 1970s; this system certifies practitioners with hundreds of hours of training.

We Asian Bodywork Therapists have been proudly practicing for decades across the United States, with no problems or issues that indicate a threat to the public requiring further government regulation, let alone a ban.

Acupuncturists deserve respect for their ability to use needles – an invasive process with chance of harm. It is reasonable for such a process to be regulated. Whether that regulation should permit acupuncturists to claim expertise or competence in Asian Bodywork therapy, is not the question that concerns me.

But static point **acupressure** poses absolutely **no threat or risk** to the public and there is no call to regulate it; especially not to **incarcerate people over it!**

Other manual modalities are the proper regulatory domain of the massage board. This bill **bizarrely** suggests that if as a massage therapist I rub a point and call it an “acupressure point” I may be jailed, but if I call it a “trigger point” I am free to practice. (Or **is it criminal to even know** that the point is “Gall Bladder 21”, “Shoulder Well”?)

Acupuncturists do not have a monopoly on applying the meridian and point theories of Chinese Medicine. There are several national organizations of acupressure and ABT practitioners, including the American Organization for Bodywork Therapies of Asia, the Ohashiatsu Network, the Acupressure Training Circle, and the Jin Shin Do Foundation. And it is proper and suitable for massage therapists to study these theories, integrate them with their knowledge of western anatomy and physiology.

This bill’s **redefinition of acupuncture** would **destroy** with the practice of Asian Bodywork therapy, and **interfere** with the practice of other massage therapists who have started to incorporate elements of ABT. It would **deprive our clients** of therapies they have come to appreciate and reply on.

It is a **grave injustice** and absolutely must be stopped.

I will be **happy to answer any questions you may have**, or to put you in contact with representatives from the national ABT professional organization, the AOBTA.

Further, I am appending a statement from Nate Novgrod, Lac, a licensed acupuncturist and continuing education provider who teaches manual therapies to both acupuncturists and massage therapists across the country and will be teaching later this year in Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration.

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To: The Honorable Members of the Senate & House

From: Nate Novgrod LAc / CEUseminars.org [2-5-26]

I am writing today to express my strong opposition to **Senate Bill 370**. While I support the mission of the State Acupuncture Board to ensure public safety, the new definitions proposed in this bill regarding "manual therapies" create a significant and scientifically unfounded encroachment on the scope of practice for Maryland's Licensed Massage Therapists (LMTs).

1. The Flawed Definition of "Energetic Physiology" SB 370 defines "Manual Therapies" as modalities that apply pressure or manipulation along points or meridians to normalize "energetic function". From a biological standpoint, physiology is physiology. All manual therapies—including massage—affect the body's energetic and electromagnetic systems, whether through nervous system regulation, blood flow, or cellular signaling. By claiming "energetic physiology" as the exclusive domain of acupuncture, this bill effectively prohibits any manual therapist from affecting the soft tissue if their intent is to influence the body's natural state.

2. Scope Overlap is the Norm, Not the Exception It is standard across all health professions for scopes of practice to overlap. Physical therapists, massage therapists, and acupuncturists all work with human soft tissue. SB 370 attempts to regulate the *framework of a practitioner's thought process* rather than the actual *technique* being applied. If an LMT applies pressure to a trigger point to relieve pain, it is considered massage. If the same LMT applies the same pressure but considers it a "meridian point," this bill would categorize that action as the unauthorized practice of acupuncture, punishable by significant fines and even felony charges for subsequent offenses.

3. Intent vs. Technique Acupuncture is defined by the use of needles. Manual pressure applied to the soft tissue is a fundamental component of massage therapy. A practitioner could simply rename their techniques—discussing "neuro-myofascial tracts" instead of "meridians"—to perform the exact same physical action. Laws should regulate physical safety and technical application, not the terminology or internal intent of a licensed professional performing safe, non-invasive manual pressure.

4. Economic Impact and Barriers to Care This bill would effectively ban common and safe practices like acupressure within a massage session unless the therapist holds a dual license. This places an undue burden on LMTs and limits the care options available to Maryland citizens who seek integrative, manual-based relief.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue an **Unfavorable Report** on SB 370. The definition of manual therapies in this bill is overbroad and threatens the livelihood of thousands of manual therapists who have safely served Marylanders for decades.