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Board of Acupuncture
Metro Executive Plaza
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**2026 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL NO: HB374
COMMITTEE: Health
POSITION: SUPPORT

TITLE: State Acupuncture Board – Revisions

BILL ANALYSIS: The bill clarifies that East Asian ‘manual therapy’, even when identified by one of its subcategories (e.g., acupressure or bodywork, forms of East Asian massage), is within the practice of acupuncture and East Asian medicine and requires a license to practice. It creates a sanction for individuals who employ or aid and abet the unauthorized practice of acupuncture and East Asian medical therapies without a license.

The bill additionally: (1) acknowledges that the Board of Acupuncture no longer provides a traditional printed license as proof of active licensure after completing the renewal process; and (2) updates the legal name of the education accrediting organization.

POSITION AND RATIONALE: The State Acupuncture Board (the “Board”) supports HB 374.

The Maryland Acupuncture Act (the “Act”) encompasses both well-known modes of practice, such as stimulation of the body through the insertion of needles and lesser known modes including East Asian manual therapy/massage and/or bodywork, such as Tui Na, Gua Sha and Acupressure. As needle acupuncture has become more widely used as an integral part of the Western health regimen, it has overshadowed the other East Asian medical therapies that are part of an acupuncturist practice, convincing some that needle work is the extent of an acupuncturist’s practice. Recently, the Board has become aware that many patients and practitioners in Maryland are unaware that the Act does include subcategories such as manual therapy, specifically acupressure.

Acupressure is a type of acupuncture (East Asian manual therapy) that uses fingers, thumbs, and other tools, excluding needles. Like with needles, acupressure targets body mapped acupoints to stimulate the flow of energy along meridians and thereby positively impacting a variety of health

conditions. Acupressure, while in existence for years and regulated by the Board since its inception as a manual therapy, has been mistakenly treated by some as a modality that does not require a license. The Board has received increasing numbers of complaints indicating that individuals are claiming to perform this modality without a license thereby skirting the law for two health occupations - Acupuncture & East Asian medicine and Massage Therapy.

Additionally, more troubling is that the ambiguity around acupressure is being exploited as a cover for sex-trafficking and slave labor businesses. Currently, the Board has no authority to sanction those skirting the law or exploiting those vulnerable to sex-trafficking and slave labor. Rather current law only allows the Board to discipline those practicing without a license. This bill also creates legal authority to criminally and administratively sanction those that employ or aid and abet the practice of acupuncture, thereby authorizing criminal authorities and the Board to take action against those exploiting victims of sex-trafficking and slave labor. This bill protects the integrity of the Act, the Board's enforcement power and ultimately its ability to protect the public in the regulation of acupuncture and East Asian medicine. The Board has put forth this proposal after collaborating with the Board of Massage Therapy Examiners, the National Certification Board of Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine, and Montgomery County Government officials including County Councilwoman Ludtke; the Women's Commission, Sex Trafficking Task Force, and members of the Police department.

Additional proposed bill changes include:

- permanent codification of the Board's ability to provide proof of licensure in alternative (other than a traditional printed license) formats; and
- updating the legal name of the Accreditation Commission of Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine to the Accreditation Commission of Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine.

Health occupations boards and commissions, as credentialing entities, are the gateway to Maryland having a high quality system of care. For more than 30 years, the Board has worked to protect the public through the administration of licensing and all the related regulatory processes for acupuncture and East Asian medicine. The proposed changes fortify the work of the Board and clarifies to both the public and professionals its scope of enforcement. Additionally, it grants the Board the ability to hold non-licensed offenders of the law accountable. It is for these reasons that the Board respectfully requests a favorable vote on HB374.

For more information, please contact Tiffany L. Smith Williams, Executive Director for the Board of Acupuncture at (410)764-5925 or tiffany.smith-williams@maryland.gov; or Lillian Reese, the Legislative & Regulatory Liaison for the boards at 443-794-4757 or at lillian.reese@maryland.gov.

The opinion of the Boards expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or the Administration.