

Testimony in favor with amendments for HB 1527, Complementary and Alternative Health Care Practice Act

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Dear Delegates:

I write **in favor of HB 1527**, with **clarifying amendments**, provided at the end of this testimony.

In summary:

- HB 1527 **protects** complementary and alternative health care practitioners and their clients
- By its very nature, **alternative care cannot be “licensed”** without losing what makes it useful. Many of these practices come from folk medicine traditions and **can easily practiced at an entry level** – they take “a minute to learn, a lifetime to master”.
- Over **30% of American adults use CAM**, because it is accessible and affordable. The modalities included in this bill are **safe** when practiced **within the parameters this bill specifies**.
- **Two small amendments can clarify** the boundaries between the forms covered by this bill and forms of CAM for which the state currently requires licensure

My Background

I am a **Maryland Licensed Massage Therapist; nationally certified as a Diplomat in Asian Bodywork Therapy by the NCBAHM; and an AOBTA Certified Practitioner.**

I have practiced massage therapy and Asian Bodywork Therapy (ABT) for over 20 years. 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. And I am a member of the **faculty of the Potomac Massage Training Institute**, where I teach fundamentals of ABT, including acupressure, to **massage therapy** students.

In my practice I also incorporate some of the modalities covered by this bill, including acupressure, reiki, qi gong, reflexology. Many massage therapists incorporate such modalities, and the NCBTMB recognizes them as valid topics for continuing education.

HB 1527 Protects Practitioners and Clients

HB 1527 (with the amendments suggested below) would **preserve what has been the status quo for massage therapists and Asian Bodywork Therapists for decades. It would protect us and our clients** from arbitrary interference by overzealous or ignorant regulatory-state bureaucrats.

Unfortunately **we are at this very moment under grave threat of such interference.** The Acupuncture Board was able to introduce SB370/HB274, which is intended to make acuPRESSURE and other forms of Asian Bodywork Therapy the exclusive domain of acuPUNCTURISTS.

That bill is still before this committee and could destroy the practice of Asian Bodywork Therapy in Maryland.

Such attempts demonstrate why HB 1527 is necessary.

Keep Alternative Care Alternative

Complementary care is health care which is **performed alongside** biomedical allopathic medicine. When I work at the hospital with cancer patients as they undergo chemotherapy, using acupressure and massage to treat nausea and neuropathic pain, I am doing complementary care. **Alternative care** is care which **provides an alternative to surgery, drugs,** or similar care. When a person comes to me to try ABT before deciding to have surgery on their bad shoulder, I am doing alternative care.

The entire point of **complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)** is that **it is not biomedical allopathic medicine. It is alternative,** as it says right in the name. It cannot be standardized and licensed without losing its defining characteristics.

Many of CAM practices come from **folk medicine** and are meant to be easily accessible and easily practiced – they can be practiced informally after minimal training, or as a dedicated skilled profession. They take “a minute to learn, a lifetime to master”.

It is an unfortunate fact that some CAM practitioners believe that they can obtain higher social status or greater income opportunities by ceasing to be alternative and joining the **high-barrier medical model** that prevents people from accessing care or providing care to each other; where burdensome regulations and licensing requirements make criminals out of people trying to help others.

You very likely will hear from some of these practitioners in opposition to this bill.

Let me be clear: **there are places where licensing is appropriate!** It is good that the state of Maryland had vetted me to work with hospital patients. It is good that someone offering brain surgery is subject to strict requirements.

But the general rule is that **people have the natural right to seek out the care they think best;** to provide the care for their fellow citizens they think best; and to do so for compensation in an **open, honest, and fair free market.**

These **rights apply even when they act to the financial detriment of practitioners in regulated fields.** Just as I have the right to provide licensed massage therapy even if it decreases business for

licensed orthopedic surgeons, so a reflexology practitioner, operating in a modality so safe it does not require licensing, has the right to provide their services even if it decreases my business.

It is natural when entrenched interests try to use the power of the state to prevent competition. **It is the duty of legislators to not permit them to do so.**

The Importance of CAM

According to the NIH, **more than 30% of American adults** use some form of CAM.

In a world where “conventional” medicine is increasingly out of reach, **CAM is affordable and accessible.**

Many licensed healthcare practitioners also practice low-barrier CAM therapies: the nurse who does reiki, the massage therapist who incorporates reflexology, the paramedic who does acupuncture to help calm an accident victim in emotional shock. In the case of massage therapy, NCBTMB recognizes many of these low-barrier modalities as valid topics for continuing education.

Low barrier CAM therapies allow people to quickly obtain a skill which they can put to work in formal or informal self-employment. I am thinking specifically of a woman I know who escaped a murderous domestic violence situation and was homeless, and during this time practiced reiki for income. I am thinking of another woman I know who worked on Baltimore's infamous Block as a "dancer" where she was pressured to perform sex work, and who left that life in part by doing "spiritual healing" work, from which she eventually developed her own successful business.

The modalities included in this bill are safe when practiced within the parameters this bill specifies. **HB 1527 keeps CAM within appropriate boundaries** by disallowing practitioners from recommending the discontinuation of conventional care, from performing invasive treatments, or from misrepresenting their training or credentials.

Proposed Amendments

1. On page 14, line 10, change

(22) TRADITIONAL ORIENTAL PRACTICES

to

(22) TRADITIONAL EAST ASIAN PRACTICES, OTHER THAN THE USE OF SKIN-PUNCTURING NEEDLES

2. Add to 22-101

BODYWORK INCLUDES ONLY TECHNIQUES OF PRESSURE OR MOVEMENT ON AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS FULLY CLOTHED, EXCEPT FOR FOOTWEAR.

I will be **happy to answer any questions you may have.** Thank you for your consideration.

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