

February 15, 2024

Representative Robert E. Craven, Sr.
House Judiciary Committee, Chair
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Opposition to H7307

Dear Chairman Craven:

As the Chair of the government relations committee of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Massage Therapy Association representing over 600 members statewide, we write to express our concerns and strong opposition to bill H7307. We cannot support any bill that allows for the practice of massage therapy without a license here in Rhode Island.

Creating safer pathways for those that are victimized is something we empathize with and are very sympathetic to, but identifying our statute as a way to gain immunity from a criminal offence that any person is subjected to, only creates a health and safety issue for the public, undermines our profession, and invites bad actors who exploit individuals through trafficking and other means. Licensing and regulation are meant to protect the public from untrained practitioners. Passage of bill H7307 will have unintended consequences of opening loopholes that could allow any individual to practice massage without a license. The massage therapy profession, or any laws pertaining to it, have absolutely nothing to do with sex work and must continue to remain completely separate from one another. It is through the unlawful use of protected language such as massage, massage therapy and massage therapist that sex workers and human traffickers use to give a false appearance to their illegal activities. Sex workers and human traffickers are outside the massage therapy profession, not a part of it.

The massage therapy profession has been licensed and regulated in the state of Rhode Island since 1978. Forty-six states across our country license and regulate massage therapy. Many professions such as Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Chiropractic Medicine/Physiotherapy, Osteopathic Medicine, Athletic Training, Hairdressers, Barbers, Nail Technicians, and Aestheticians are licensed and regulated to use massage as a modality within their authorized scope of practice in accordance with the general laws of Rhode Island. The practice of massage therapy becoming unlicensed negatively impacts our profession directly, as well as those professions listed above that use massage as a modality on a daily basis.

Effective January 2022, the term "Massage Parlor" was eliminated from use by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) for non-medical massages under code 812199 and is now referenced as "Massage Wellness Spas/Centers". All massage therapy provided as an integrated health therapy, continues to remain under the larger umbrella of "Other Health Practitioners", code 621399. The massage therapy profession is part of healthcare and wellness and has been for the last 5,000 years.

We do not understand the rationale of creating this loophole, but we are confident it will be used to exploit individuals. We therefore urge you to not support this bill or let it become law.

Sincerely,

Cassie A. Rawcliffe, LMT
Government Relations Chair/Delegate
AMTA RI Chapter

Cc: All members of the House Committee on Judiciary