March 27, 2012

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Chair
United States House of Representatives
1230 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3305

The Honorable Ruben Hinojosa, Ranking Minority Member
United States House of Representatives
2262 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-4315


Dear Representatives Foxx and Hinojosa:

The American Art Therapy Association is the professional membership organization for practitioners, educators and researchers engaged in the field of art therapy. The Association comprises over 5,500 national and international members and works in concert with its 37 state and regional chapters. Practicing art therapy members are licensed master-level or doctoral-level art therapists, who practice under a variety of licensure titles, including as licensed art therapists, counselors, psychologists, occupational therapists, marriage and family therapists and others, depending upon their individual qualifications and practice focus.

Art therapy has the unique ability to unlock emotional expression by facilitating non-verbal communication. This is especially useful in cases where talk therapy has little or no effect, due to impairment of verbal expression that is characteristic of autism and other developmental disorders, as well as various pediatric cognitive and emotional problems. Children unable to find words to express their emotional status or reactions typically discover a freer world of expression through art therapy that leads to healing. Art therapy’s singular benefits and success is increasingly recognized by the medical community as a valuable asset, whether provided solo or added to interdisciplinary teams that treat a wide spectrum of mental and physical disorders.

We write to express appreciation and support bill for H.R. 2954, the “Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2011” that Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA-9) introduced September 15, 2011 with seventy-eight cosponsors. It was referred to the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training on November 18, 2011, where it continues to reside for consideration.

We agree with the bill’s intent to amend the Public Health Service the Social Security Act, and the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to expand the collection and analysis of data in programs of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for the purpose of improving public health. We particularly support the following provisions to:

- Improve cultural competence in federal health care programs and services, including by establishing the Robert T. Matsui Center for Cultural and Linguistic Competence in Health Care;
• Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services (Secretary) to engage in activities to improve health workforce diversity;
• Expand access to health care and health care insurance for immigrants, increasing Medicaid payments to territories and to Native Hawaiian health centers, and providing for border health grants;
• Set forth programs to reduce health disparities affecting minorities and rural residents;
• Establish an Office of Minority Health in the Department of Veterans Affairs;
• Expand Medicare coverage of marriage and family therapist services and mental health counselor services; and
• Provide for community mental health services to be offered through federally-qualified behavioral health centers.

Art therapists are fully qualified therapeutic professionals, as recognized by the states that licensed them, so the quality of care they provide is equivalent to their professional health care peers. Art therapy is a clinical modality now being broadly utilized to treat children and adults for a multiplicity of disorders, including autism, cognitive and emotional problems, post-stroke residuals, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) of varied etiologies, and the effects of traumatic brain injury (TBI).

We would very much welcome and appreciate the opportunity to speak to you and your staff about this bill. Please let us know when your schedule allows a convenient date and time for us to meet. Thank you, again, for your service with regard to this crucial issue.

Very sincerely yours,

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cc:
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