American Art Therapy Association
“White Paper” for State Art Therapy Licensure
June 2013

What is the purpose of the bill? The bill seeks to provide regulatory oversight of the profession of art therapy in the state of [STATE] through licensure of art therapists [Licensed Professional Art Therapist, LPAT]. By establishing standards of professional practice and qualifications for art therapists, the bill would protect the citizens of the state by assuring that only appropriately educated and licensed art therapists can practice this unique and important mental health service.

What is art therapy? Art therapy is a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem. A goal in art therapy is to improve or restore a client's functioning and his or her sense of personal well-being. Art therapy practice requires knowledge of studio art (drawing, painting, sculpture, etc.) and the creative process, as well as psychopathology, human psychological growth and development, counseling and psychological theories and techniques, ethics, research, and assessment.

Art therapy is already widely practiced in [STATE] in a variety of settings, including hospitals, psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, wellness centers, forensic institutions, schools, crisis centers, senior communities, private practice, and other clinical and community settings. Art therapists work with diverse client populations in individual, couples, family, and group therapy formats. During individual and/or group sessions, art therapists elicit their clients' inherent capacity for art making to enhance their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Research supports the use of art therapy within a professional relationship for the therapeutic benefits gained through artistic self-expression and reflection for individuals who experience illness, trauma, and mental health problems, and those seeking personal growth.

How does the public benefit from an art therapy license? There is increasing need for trained and experienced mental health professionals to provide assessment and treatment services for important segments of the state’s population: for children and young adults experiencing behavior problems and mental health conditions; for military personnel and their families who have experienced a decade of war deployments and are experiencing mental health problems, including posttraumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, depression, and increasing rates of suicide; for the growing numbers of older persons suffering with dementia, depression, and other mental health conditions; and for those experiencing trauma from natural disasters, abuse, drug dependency, or other mental health problems in the general population. Art therapists are helping to meet this need in schools, hospitals, senior communities, crisis centers, and other settings across [STATE]. This specialized therapeutic practice, when properly used by
trained and experienced art therapists, employs the clinical application of the process of art making to unlock behavioral and mental conditions that adversely affect normal functioning and to help restore or improve individuals’ ability to function.

Art therapy is a unique profession with educational and clinical practice requirements that equal or exceed those of other mental health professionals that are currently licensed by the state of [STATE]. National requirements for professional entry into the practice of art therapy include, at minimum, a master's degree from institutions of higher education accredited by one of the regional or national institutional bodies recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), adherence to the rigorous educational standards established by the American Art Therapy Association and independently reviewed by the Education Program Approval Board, and extensive post-graduate clinical experience under the supervision of a credentialed art therapist. The Art Therapy Credentials Board also oversees the continuing education and experience of master’s level art therapists in the United States by providing professional credentials, and by requiring continuing education to maintain credentials. Licensure of art therapists would help [STATE] build and maintain a viable mental health workforce by recognizing, attracting, and retaining these highly trained health professionals.

Why is having a distinct license important in mental health? Art therapy services are distinct from those of other mental health professionals. Art therapists are specialized health professionals with an art therapy master’s degree who are trained and have extensive clinical experience in both the therapeutic use of art and psychology. They use art and the creative process in assessment and treatment of clients who may lack the ability to communicate their thoughts and emotions to other health professionals due to trauma, abuse, accidents, severe illness, substance abuse, autism, dementia, or other disorders. Art therapists offer their services individually and also as part of teams of clinical health care professionals. There is increasing evidence that individuals who lack art therapy master’s level education are using art techniques in their work with clients and calling it “art therapy.” These individuals are misleading the public and may be placing the people they work with at risk by evoking emotional or traumatic experiences which they are not trained to safely address. Licensure of art therapists is necessary to define appropriate standards for the practice of art therapy and to ensure that the public has access to art therapy services provided by a master's level trained and licensed art therapist.

How does a master’s degree in art therapy education compare with other mental health professions? Minimum educational, professional, and ethical standards for the art therapy profession are established by the American Art Therapy Association, a national non-profit membership and advocacy organization which serves its members and the public by providing standards of professional competence and promoting knowledge in, and of, the field of art therapy. The Association’s Education Committee sets the stringent Educational Standards of the profession used by more than 34 accredited colleges and universities nationwide that provide an art therapy master’s degree. The Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) grants registration (ATR) to art therapists who meet post graduate supervised practice requirements and professional credentialing (ATR-BC) to those who pass the rigorous board
Art therapists graduating from accredited master’s degree programs have had extensive training with clinical internships, and are thoroughly prepared to provide excellent care to their clients. Educational requirements involve multiple disciplines that include theories of art therapy, counseling and psychotherapy; ethics and standards of practice; assessment and evaluation; individual, group and family art therapy techniques; human psychological and creative development; multicultural and diversity issues; research methods; and internship experiences in clinical, community, and/or other settings. In fact, art therapists meet the licensing requirements for education and training set forth in most states for licensing other mental health professionals, but the services they provide are distinct and require a separate license.

**What is the fiscal impact on the State and the [NAME OF THE STATE LICENSING BOARD]?**

Licensure of art therapists will encourage qualified professionals to remain in [STATE] and provide critically needed mental health services to residents of the state. It will also provide a means of attracting professional art therapists from neighboring states who may not yet have the benefit of a state art therapy license. These professionals will contribute to the economy of the state through expansion of their business or practice, increased employment, and payment of taxes. Licensure of art therapists will produce new fee revenue for the state, with licensure fees likely to offset additional administrative costs in the initial years of licensure and net fee revenue increasing in subsequent years with license renewals.

[Note—there are different ways to describe the fiscal impact of art therapy licensure on a state’s licensing board based on how each chapter intends to structure the licensing bill. The following examples describe the impact on the licensing board—(A) for a bill in which the requirements for licensure are defined in the bill and where primary responsibility for reviewing and issuing licenses and renewals is given to an advisory committee of the licensing board made up primarily of licensed art therapists; and (B) a bill in which applicants for licensure must achieve board certification by the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) in advance of applying for a state license.]

**A.** Licensure would be provided through the state's existing [NAME OF THE STATE LICENSING BOARD]. The requirements for licensure of art therapists in the bill meet or exceed the standards for other professionals licensed by the Board. The bill creates an Art Therapy Advisory Committee under the Board consisting of licensed art therapists who would have primary responsibility for processing and issuing licenses and renewals to applicants who meet all requirements, maintaining a current register of license holders and establishing criteria for continuing education, subject to approval by the Board. Members of the Advisory Committee would not receive compensation other than reimbursement of expenses. Since the licensing requirements in the bill meet or exceed the requirements for Board Certification as an art therapist by the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB), the ATCB could help provide a point of verification of applicants’ educational and training experience, as well as document their ongoing expertise through continuing education and a rigorous exam. The [NAME OF THE CHAPTER] Art Therapy Association is also prepared to provide an application review service for potential applicants to ensure that applications are complete and ready
for submission to the \[NAME OF THE LICENSING BOARD\] that could further minimize administrative costs. There are currently \[NUMBER\] art therapists who would qualify as Licensed Professional Art Therapists in the first 1-2 years after the legislation becomes effective, providing \[dollar amount based on number of therapists multiplied by the licensing fee\] in new revenue to the Board that would offset initial-year increases in Board expenditures and cost reimbursement. Renewal fees in subsequent years would require minimal administrative costs and produce increasing net revenue to the Board and the state.

**B. Licensure would be provided through the state's existing \[NAME OF THE STATE LICENSING BOARD\].** The bill requires that art therapists achieve Board Certification (ATR-BC) with the national Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) before applying for licensure. This process includes two years of master’s-level education, at least two clinical internships in varied health settings, post-graduation clinical work with intensive supervision, one year of registration with the board, and a board certification exam – a process which requires a minimum of four years. The ATCB could assist the Board by serving as a point of verification of applicants’ educational and training qualifications and thus minimize the cost of added staffing, documentation and processing for the \[NAME OF THE STATE LICENSING BOARD\]. The \[NAME OF THE CHAPTER\] Art Therapy Association is prepared to provide an application review service to ensure that applications are complete and ready for submission to the \[NAME OF THE LICENSING BOARD\] to further minimize administrative costs. There are currently \[NUMBER\] art therapists who would qualify as Licensed Professional Art Therapists in the first 1-2 years after the legislation becomes effective, providing \[dollar amount based on number of therapists multiplied by the licensing fee\] in new revenue to the Board and the state, with increasing net revenues in subsequent years from license renewals and licensure of qualified art therapist who will return to practice in the state.