



HF2743

Health Finance and Policy Committee

Position: **Favorable**

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Testimonial from Erin Rafferty-Bugher, ATR-BC, LPCG

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Chairwoman Liebling and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of HF 2743 which would provide Clinical Art Therapist with an independent state license.

The protection of the public is crucial in this licensing bill. An AT license will protect the public by making sure that trained art therapists will be providing ethical art therapy-based services. Art therapy training is specialized and specific to the arts and psychotherapy practice. Art therapists have in-depth training in understanding psychotherapy and artistic/ non-verbal processes including the use of integrating art materials and media within a therapeutic context. The mechanism of using the materials in a therapeutic context and the effects of the materials and media on the brain and body including behaviors are the pinnacle of art therapy. Art Therapists are specialists in providing trauma informed therapeutic services including non-verbal mechanisms of change. A trained art therapist is aware of the potential risks involved in the media and materials choices that may cause harm such as behavioral *regressions*, *exacerbation of symptom presentations and behaviors*, and *the risk of flooding from the trauma experiences due to the exposure of potentially triggering materials and media*. Art therapists are trained in understanding the significance and importance of what, why, how, and when we chose materials to engage within the therapy session.

The best practice for trauma-informed care is to provide non-verbal access to memory retrieval via art-based modalities including art therapy to process traumatic experiences. It is a clinician's ethical obligation to provide trauma informed work that supports healing in the best ways we know how using current evidence-based research and practice.

Art therapy de-stigmatizes the therapeutic process for a wide variety of populations and cultural backgrounds. The art therapy experiences provide a positive connection and association to the mental health experience and *increases the engagement and motivation* for

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people to seek and receive mental health services and support for their overall wellbeing. This directly impacts our society's overall health and wellness.

On a personal level, I have been practicing actively as an art therapist since 1998 for over 26 years. I have worked with children, adolescents, older adults with Dementia and Alzheimer's disease, adults with addiction challenges and chronic mental health issues. The common denominator is that most of these people have experienced various degrees of traumatic experiences. Currently, my position as an art therapist involves working with countless patients on the inpatient mental health unit at United Hospital- Allina downtown St. Paul as part of the clinical mental health team. Each patient that comes through the door is there to find stability due to intended harm to harm themselves or others. One of the main areas that provide the patients a sense of hope is experiencing art therapy as part of their healing process. Patients state that, "art therapy supports relaxation, offers regulation, a sense of calm and peace including a safe space to contain and express complex feelings" that often are not accessible through verbal articulation. Quite frankly, they attribute the experience as saving their life. The art therapy process offers a sense of hope. A voice for those that feel they have no voice. The licensure bill for clinical art therapy is for protection of the public and protection of humanity.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have regarding art therapy or this legislation.

Respectfully,
Erin Rafferty-Bugher, ATR-BC, LPCC