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SUBMISSION OF ELECTRONIC TESTIMONY
RE: S.B. No. 354 AN ACT CONCERNING ART THERAPY
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My name is Abbe Miller, MS, ATR-BC, LPC. I am the Director and Associate Professor of the Graduate Art Therapy Program at Albertus Magnus College, New Haven, CT. I have been a practicing art therapist in the state of CT for the past 33 years and I have been in private practice for over 30 years. I am representing the field of art therapy as well as the graduate students who are training to be licensed professional and ethical art therapists.

To practice as an art therapist legally, you must obtain a Master's degree. The profession is a clinical one and vulnerable human beings are the central focus of our work. There are only 39 accredited masters degree programs for Art Therapy in the United States. I know first hand the rigorous and conscious training that goes into developing our new clinicians, preparing them for the awesome task of communicating via the visual arts. However, there are many 'helpful' people who say they are art therapists, simply because they offer art as a means to express, explore and perhaps pass the time – but often these folks can do more harm than good. Our clients and consumers need the protection of licensure of art therapists simply because the power of artistic communication holds great power.

There is something quite vulnerable in artistic expression. Those who have not been adequately trained to foster healing via these expressions, both with attention to the medium chosen as well as the ways in which the communications are encouraged and processed, put our consumers in precarious positions. How many of you saw the most recent "National Geographic" magazine? On the cover was a poignant photograph of a veteran, holding a mask that he created, in art therapy at the VA, over his face. Reading the article, you can get a clear sense of the power of art therapy and the intense scope of challenges that regularly emerge when working in this field. Art Therapy is not just for children.

Recall if you will, a time during your schooling when you perhaps had an art teacher who was less than supportive, perhaps critical. Or you, yourself, found yourself frustrated with your own artwork and the product and therefore, decided you could not do art. A whole avenue of expression was cut off for you. Rather than helping you develop joy and engagement with the process of making art, you believed that you could not use this in your life. People who say they are art therapists without the proper training can do the same kind of harm, by focusing only on the product. Licensure for art therapists, specifically, will insure that our clientele are more fully protected from harm, and that they are entitled to a professional who can help them develop new expressive and coping skills via art making. For some, this art making even becomes a vocational path, such as the “Art Connection” studio in Hartford, CT; an art therapy based facility, run by Vinfen. This program utilizes what might be called “vocational art therapy” as a means of enhancing self-esteem and discovery of meaning of one’s life. They employ masters-level art therapists because they understand and support the skills that are needed to enrich their clients.

Our graduate program places students into programs for Internship all over the state, with varied populations. They are always supervised by licensed clinicians, and they are able to offer a unique skill set of clinical, therapeutic interventions for a variety of patients: young and old, emotionally and physically challenged; ill and dying; recovering and thriving while learning a new vocation. The possibilities are vast in the field of art therapy, but the potential for misuse of the modality is also all too real. Licensure for art therapist would help to protect our consumers and identify the profession of art therapy as the unique profession that it truly is.

I would strongly urge the Committee to pass Proposed S.B. 354 in favor of Licensure for Art Therapists in the State of Connecticut. This bill is necessary because of the many changes that are occurring within the human services professions at this time. At present, qualified master degree art therapists, who complete the requisite post-masters hours, log supervision and pass the State Licensing exam, may submit to be licensed as Professional Counselors. While this has been an adequate form of protecting consumers, it is not ideal. Licensure as a Professional Counselor does not protect consumers from those who say they are art therapists, or doing art therapy, without the proper training. The profession of art therapy is more than merely using the medium of art making. There are conceptual, theoretical and clinical formulations that directly impact our vulnerable clients/patients/consumers.

Art Therapy involves aspects of counseling, but it encompasses so much more in practice. Appropriate, ethical training is needed, and the best way to protect consumers (who are increasing in numbers) is to identify specific licensure for the profession.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of passing **S.B. No. 354**.

Sincerely,

Abbe Miller, MS, ATR, LPC