Senator Fonfara, Representative Rojas, Committee members:

My name is Deby Van Ohlen, I live in House District 20 and am a small business owner in West Hartford. I co-own Nurturing Handsllc that has been in business since 2001; first on Park Road and now at 777 Farmington Avenue. We have been providing massage therapy healthcare to the West Hartford community for the past 18 years.

You have received testimony regarding massage therapy’s value in pain management, in the treatment of premature infants, and in injury and performance work with athletes. You’ve also received a listing of the institutions and agencies recognizing massage therapy as a health care profession and utilizing it as such. When I wrote to you regarding SB877 voicing my opposition to recategorizing massage therapy to personal service instead of health care, I detailed my experience seeing the health impact massage therapy had on first responders at different disaster deployments.

The above information emphasizes massage therapy as healthcare. I want to continue the discussion and address a misconception that came up as I was talking with various people at the public hearing on March 15th. It is illustrated by the following questions: “...but is it relaxation massage or therapeutic massage?” and, “...is it medical massage or relaxation only?” The answer to those questions is yes. Yes, because there is no “or”. Massage therapy is therapeutic, meaning it has health benefits. One of the ways that it is therapeutic is by promoting relaxation, because relaxation is therapeutic. What do I mean by that?

In 2010 in Connecticut, 5.8 billion dollars of medical expenses were due to heart disease and cerebrovascular disease. Cancers of all sorts also require significant medical expenditures. The prevalence of self-reported anxiety and depression is increasing at an alarming rate. I have listed these five illnesses/conditions because the effects of the stress response are critical contributing factors in all of them. Reducing the stress response by promoting relaxation, would be helpful. Stress raises blood pressure and heart rate; massage therapy lowers them. Stress adversely impacts the efficiency of our immune system; massage therapy increases leukocyte production. Those effects target the top 3 leading causes of death in the U.S. --- heart disease, cancers and stroke.
Anxiety and depression affect quality of life, work productivity and cost billions of health care dollars. They exist on their own and also in conjunction with other diseases. And they are part of the stress continuum. In a meta-analysis done in 2004 by Christopher Moyer, “quantitative research reviews show that a series of massage therapy treatments consistently produces sizable reductions of depression in adult recipients. The effects of massage therapy on anxiety are even better understood. A single session of massage therapy significantly reduces state anxiety, and multiple sessions of massage therapy significantly reduce trait anxiety.” Promoting relaxation, reducing stress, lessening depression, relieving anxiety are all results from the therapeutic and relaxing modality of massage therapy.

There are research studies on the effects of massage therapy on inflammation, on burn scars, on osteoarthritis of the knee, on lessening sun-downing in Alzheimer patients, and many others. What I want to emphasize is that massage therapy is therapeutic providing health benefits. This is the case whether addressing individual areas of the body such as working on a frozen shoulder or by impacting the body systemically by relaxation, by lessening pain and by reducing depression and anxiety.

I urge you to continue categorizing massage therapy as the healthcare profession that it is and maintain its exemption from sales tax.

Thank you for your service in the important work at our Capitol,

Deby Van Ohlen, LMT #1389