

Senate Government Operations Committee,

Hello, my name is Sarah Gauthier. I am writing to you in regards to the legislative bill to be reviewed in March regarding approval for certification for Creative Arts Therapist's in Vermont. First and foremost thank you so much for your time in reading to my story about my journey as an Art Therapist. I hope that hearing my experiences and hopes for the future for our community inspire you to help us advocate for positive changes for the people of Vermont and the field of Art Therapy.

My drive and passion for the field of Art Therapy developed at a fairly young age when I learned about it through my own personal experiences of receiving support from an Art Therapist while my 9 year old cousin was in hospice care losing his battle to cancer. I was 15 and I remember the impacts Art Therapy had on me and my family by allowing us to find peace, acceptance and still somehow hope during some of our darkest hours. Processing this loss through art with a Licensed Art Therapist was an experience that truly changed me and started my own journey in pursuing a life built around helping others through the therapeutic creative arts process. I went on to get my Bachelors in Psychology and Fine Arts then my Masters in Creative Arts Therapy at Hofstra University in New York. After I completed my Masters I was motivated to get all credential requirements completed as soon as I could to be able to fulfill my dream of working as an Art Therapist. During the day's I worked in an inclusion program with children with behavioral issues in Long Island, NY and then in the evenings and on weekends I worked at an adult in-patient psychiatric hospital in Queens. I remember working up to 70 hours some weeks to obtain field hour requirements but never feeling tired because I was so invested in the work I was doing. After 2 years of handwork I was officially a Board Certified Art Therapist (ATR-BC), a Licensed Creative Arts Therapist (LCAT) and had a job lined up as a Creative Arts Therapist at a VA hospital in New York City. All my dreams were becoming realities but while completing paperwork to accept the position I could not shake this pit in my stomach feeling like I was making a mistake staying in New York.

In the 8 years that I had been living away from Vermont, I had a few friends die from drugs and suicide and even more friends that were struggling with mental health issues, but couldn't find the right services or any services at all. Similar to the feeling that sparked my career in Art Therapy at the age of 15 I felt a deep inner calling and obligation to bring back my knowledge and experiences as an Art Therapist to my home and the community in Vermont that was struggling.

I took a large leap of faith leaving New York in 2016 and I cannot say that it has been easy to utilize my skills as an Art Therapist in the way that I envisioned. When I moved back, there were zero job opportunities in the community, hospitals, private practice, designated agencies etc for Art Therapist's so I ended up taking a job doing case management at Howard Center in Burlington while trying to navigate the vastly different rules and regulations related to OPR and licensed professions in Vermont as compared to New York. Since licensure for Art Therapist was not an option in Vermont and although I could practice with the qualifications I had, not having a license was limiting with who I could serve (only out of pocket pay, grants, clinical funds through Medicaid, etc- insurances can't be billed by non-licensed professionals) and where I could work (only positions that did not require a license). I explored options for obtaining another license in a related field and was met with more hurdles than I can even count such as needing to take several more graduate courses, take more exams, gain more in-field client and supervision hours etc. I have been discouraged from pursuing career development opportunities due to not having a Vermont license, even though my education, credentials and experience in the field are equivalent if not higher to others in related fields such as social work or mental health counselors. I have been so discouraged by the lack of support from the state with recognition for being a credentialed professional and have had many opportunities to return to New York where I could start a job as an Art Therapist tomorrow, but I find more value in advocating to help my community get more accessibility to therapeutic services.

This year will be my 7th year working for the Howard Center and within the many roles that I have had within the agency I have gained a good understanding about the system of care and resources in our community for mental health support. I currently work as a Crisis Clinician for a short term children's crisis stabilization program (Jarrett House) and I become more hopeless each day about the lack of available services in our community. I make referrals for outpatient therapeutic supports for the acute children that I am providing short term care to and see across the state waitlists that

are so substantial that is pointless to even make referrals. The waitlist for Howard Center outpatient therapy for children is so long (over a year) that they are currently not accepting any referrals. To me this is completely unacceptable.

At the end of the day, our community is struggling and the struggles are continuing to increase, while the available supports and services seem to be decreasing. Declining the request for approval for licensure for Creative Arts Therapist in Vermont is increasing the risk of harm in our community by blocking the opportunity for so many individuals to be able to easily access this therapeutic service. Thank you again for your time and consideration with helping to advocate for passing the bill to approve licensure for Vermont Art Therapists.

With gratitude,

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**Sarah Gauthier, MA, ATC-BC, LCAT**[[  
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Non-Licensed and Non-Certified Psychotherapist (License # 097.01332203)

Board-Certified Art Therapist (#15-242)

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Credentialed Professional through American Art Therapy Association

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