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My name is Sheryl Rapée-Adams. I have a master of science in organizational leadership and management, more than 1,500 hours of professional massage training, and 26 years' experience as a professional massage therapist. I was a consultant on the second edition of *The Educated Heart: Professional Boundaries for Massage Therapists and Bodyworkers*. I began practicing in Vermont in 1997 with my husband, Chris Adams, a massage therapist for 37 years. Our Montpelier practice, Massage Vermont LLC, is closed temporarily during the pandemic.

Chris and I thank OPR, Senator Hardy, and the committee for your work. We strongly support S.220's provisions for regulating Vermont massage therapists, bodyworkers, and touch practitioners with registration as being necessary and sufficient to protect Vermonters.

Complaints about touch practitioners overwhelmingly concern those who abuse their position, as occurred in Middlebury. With massage therapist licensing, the confessed Middlebury offender and others could simply walk away from being "massage therapists" become, say, "somatic practitioners," and carry on.

Ms. Hibbert questioned whether full licensure might inhibit practitioners from offending. In late 2019, a licensed South Carolina massage therapist touted as a "Hilton Head legend" with a "healing touch" was arrested on charges of voyeurism—there are thought to be at least 50 victims. (<https://www.wtoc.com/2019/10/16/hilton-head-island-masseur-accused-recording-women-changing-clothes/>). A licensed Massachusetts massage therapist, husband, and father who called his massage school graduation "life changing" was charged with rape and indecent assault and battery (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/10/17/licensed-massage-therapist-charged-with-raping-client-north-reading/qbiqL6PbTG8IBcyKunQkDP/story.html>).

Representative Gardner sensibly questioned Vermont's being one of only four U.S. states without massage regulation. It's because one organization, the American Massage Therapy Association, funds state-by-state lobbying to push its own licensing bills and collects substantial revenues from massage therapists who must work under them. AMTA is merely one of several organizations Vermont touch practitioners can join. AMTA's website shows just 72 Vermont members (<https://www.amtamassage.org/find-massage-therapist/?location=vermont&page=1>), a fraction of Vermont's estimated 900 to 2,000 touch practitioners. Even AMTA's small Vermont chapter is deeply divided; licensure opponents among them alerted me that this bill was on the move.

Since OPR's 2010 Sunrise Review, Chris and I have been reviewing and testifying on the effects of massage therapist regulation. Despite anecdotal claims of unlicensed massage practitioners injuring clients, bodyworkers can purchase \$2 million in practice liability insurance for as little as \$96 a year. An insurance industry data expert told Chris that claims related to massage injuries are so few as to be statistically undetectable.

In 2000, the most recent example we could find, a letter to the Minnesota Touch Movement Network from the president of the International Massage Association, which then covered 5,000 members with a minimum of 100 hours of training each, stated that

- IMA had "no record of any claim filed for injuries caused by improper use of techniques"
- "It is only logical that there be some validation of these claims of physical harm, or frankly, they are probably fiction.
- "the cost of our malpractice coverage has been reduced by 50% over the past five years due to the lack of claims."

(http://www.ramblemuse.com/articles/will_green.html)

Massage remains unlicensed in Minnesota, but a bill was introduced in the 2019–2020 legislative session because AMTA never stops pushing.

(<https://www.facebook.com/page/119317994750154/search/?q=licensing>)

The massage therapy most Vermonters utilize is comfort care based in the healing power of touch itself. With little or no training, gently, safely, and lovingly, family members massage infants, and friends and family touch people of advanced age and those who are profoundly ill. I deeply value my massage school education, as do my colleagues, yet accredited massage schools differ in their curricular and pedagogical quality, which is not necessarily evidence based, and produces graduates with widely varying technical and relational competencies. Touch therapists practicing highly skilled subspecialties, such as medical massage, could utilize title protection with certification to ensure standardized education and competencies. But to force all massage therapists into a licensing scheme makes no sense.

Some claim licensure would have helped reduce confusion around Vermont's touch practitioner reopenings amid the pandemic. Actually, there is chaos among the forty-six state that regulate massage therapists. Many state massage boards kicked the COVID can to private professional organizations. The tension between their members eager to return to work and those favoring more caution has resulted in ambiguous recommendations and reports of COVID-19 community spread among massage therapists and their clients. (<https://www.healwell.org/blog/worst-game-ever/>)

My interest is ensuring that professional regulation protects Vermonters and will do more good than harm. Regulation in the form of S.220's registration for all Vermont touch practitioners is the likeliest path to that outcome.

Thank you for your work to advance the helping and healing practices of massage and bodywork in Vermont as you protect Vermonters, including we who practice touch therapies.