

2/24/2020

Melanie Giangreco, National Board Certified Reflexologist, owner of Mpath, LLC in Richmond, VT

Regarding: Senate Bill 270, an act relating to the professional regulation of massage therapy

Defining Massage and Complementary Health Practices for Licensure or Registration

Senate Bill 270 (as introduced) defines “Practice of massage therapy” in very broad terms. While this definition achieves the goal of grouping as many practitioners together in order to provide an avenue for the public to raise concerns in the event of unethical or unsafe behavior, it does not distinguish between multiple professions that involve touch. Techniques such as Reflexology, Rolwing/Structural Integration, Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique and many more all involve touch, but are not massage. These techniques all have their own histories, vocabulary, theories, training methods, and scopes of practice that are separate from any other professions.

Whether the Senate Committee on Government Operations is in favor of licensure, or amends S. 270 to consider registration, it is still important for matters of professional integrity, clarity for consumers, and public health that there be clear definitions of the various touch professions. The lack of a precise definition could create confusion as well as potential loopholes or disincentives for people to become licensed or registered.

In the scenario of licensure with specific qualifications, certain practices could be exempt, especially those where the client remains clothed and/or the scope of practice is limited. In order to avoid unethical or predatory people from using exemptions as a loophole to avoid licensure, there could be conditions placed on that exemption. For example, an exemption for reflexology could read: “The term ‘massage’ does not apply to an individual practicing reflexology who meets the requirements and passes the national certification examination of the American Reflexology Certification Board or other psychometrically valid national reflexology exam approved by the State of Vermont.” Another option is creating licensure for complementary health practices other than massage, as is the case in New Hampshire.¹

In the scenario of registration without specific qualifications, a precise definition and exemptions with conditions are still needed. If there are no qualifications for registering as a massage therapist, it creates an ethical dilemma for touch professionals who are not massage therapists. If they register, they are implying they are a massage therapist, which could be seen as unethical because it is misleading to potential clients. If they do not register (since they are not massage therapists), they risk legal action against them for continuing to practice since their profession involves touch. Again, an updated definition and conditional exemptions would create a solution that protects public health, while still allowing the public to access health practitioners of their choosing, and allowing small business owners to continue to succeed.

¹ New Hampshire Office of Professional Licensure and Certification: Requirements for licensing as a Reflexologist, Structural Integrator, or Asian Bodywork Therapist in New Hampshire:
<https://www.oplc.nh.gov/reflexology/licensing-requirements.htm>