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ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR MASSAGE THERAPISTS



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Communicating with Elected Officials: An Advocacy Guide for Licensed Massage Therapists

Welcome!

USOLMT is a coalition of massage therapists who want to work together to create positive changes in the world of massage therapy in the United States. We are a membership organization governed by a Leadership Council, representing massage students and professional massage therapists in the United States. LMT Body Politic provides resources and commentary for the massage therapy community as we assert our rights as a healthcare profession. This document was developed in collaboration by founders, Stephanie Rodriguez, LMT, Founder & Executive Director of USOLMT and Deborah Kimmet, M.S., LMT, CMBE, BCTMB, Founder of LMT Body Politic.

USOLMT's mission is to educate, elevate, encourage, and empower professional massage therapists in the United States. USOLMT advocates for the massage therapy industry by educating, elevating, and encouraging professional massage therapists to break with old paradigms within our profession and assists by empowering present and future massage professionals.

Professional Massage Therapists improve the quality of people's lives through compassionate touch therapy. We want all massage professionals to have the guidance they need to be successful. USOLMT and LMT Body Politic assist massage therapists in becoming advocates for themselves, their industry, and their colleagues.

We look forward to working together to amplify your voices in our industry!

Through this toolkit, we will assist you in:

- Understanding the importance of knowing your representatives
- Understanding the basic legislative process
- How to contact lawmakers and their staff to communicate about issues that are important to you
- Understanding advocacy

Laws and regulations are continually changing, and the process varies from state to state. We look forward to assisting you in learning how to navigate the process and making an impact.

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Who Are Your Representatives?

The first step in becoming a successful advocate for yourself and your industry is knowing who represents you in government. One of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it has exposed just how impactful elected officials at every level of government can be, directly impacting massage therapists in the workplace, in business, and in their cities or towns, counties, states, and nationally.

Our elected officials get the chance to vote on a wide variety of items, but they are not required to be experts in the items on which they vote. They listen to lobbyists, constituents, and those who establish themselves as experts when considering their decision. These are the “influencers” in government.

USOLMT’s priority in advocacy is ensuring that the rights of massage therapists remain unviolated in their massage schools, workplaces and in the industry. You have rights as a citizen of the United States, Small Business or Workplace Rights established within your state, and Local / Individual Rights in your practice as a massage therapist. You, as a massage therapist, can approach your legislators as a constituent, not a lobbyist, and give your professional thoughts and opinions when massage matters are considered for legislation.

Government Representatives:

You can find who represents you at the local, state, and federal levels here:

<https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>

Local Officials:

Your local officials can go by different names, but generally there’s a mayor, a city or town council, and a county commission or board of Supervisors. They are generally divided into city/town/municipal officials and county/parish officials. These elected officials, along with school boards, can have a direct impact on your business and in your treatment room. Many cities and counties have instituted establishment licensing, business licensing, and zoning laws as ways to combat human trafficking and prostitution. These types of laws determine when, where, and how you work and create barriers for massage therapists practicing their craft. Their decisions during the Covid-19 pandemic clearly shows their impact, as they have created and enforced public health related mandates, business closures, developed business guidelines, and more. In many areas, county officials have no say over what happens inside of a city/town and vice-versa: city officials have no say over what happens outside of their boundaries. Understanding these jurisdictional boundaries can help you determine where you want to set up your business.

State Representatives:

Your state representatives include state senators, the state house of representatives and the governor. Your state representatives introduce and vote on state-wide legislation. Professional licensing of individuals in the industry is typically regulated at the state level. Licensing of massage businesses, often called establishment licensing, is often regulated on the local level, but some states have enacted these laws at the state level. There are still a few states in the United States that remain unlicensed or unregulated. Licensing for the industry is regulated at the state level.

At the state level, massage therapists can build relationships with their representatives and educate them about issues in the massage industry. Individuals from the industry that connect with their representatives will increase opportunities to share career expertise and to educate the government.

National Representatives:

At the national, or Federal level, members of congress represent you. These members of congress include two senators and one representative. Issues that are relevant to massage at the federal level include taxes, unemployment, human trafficking and prostitution, workplace regulation, and even regulation of the medical and prescription drug fields. Two current acts in national legislation, the PRO Act and the NO PAIN Act have the potential to affect the massage field directly as well as the Federal Massage Therapy Compact.

You can connect with your members of congress to build support for issues that are important to you.

Tracking Legislation:

Where to Track

USOLMT tracks legislation here: <https://openstates.org/> and here: <https://www.congress.gov/>. We encourage you to search these open databases to see what proposals may have to potential to impact your work. If bills are harmful to the profession, we encourage you to take collective action. Collective action means working together rather than individually to make a bigger impact.

To track local legislation, search for the city or county government website and follow the meeting agendas or look to see if they have a webpage for proposed ordinances.

How to Track

When you open the public database sites, you'll be able to enter search terms and see results.

Search terms you can use are "massage", "physical therapy", "spa", "bodywork", "human trafficking", "prostitution", "conditional use", "establishment licensing", "facility licensing", "facilities licensing, "professional licensing" and even "occupational licensing".

Understanding the Process:

It is very important that when you identify a proposed law or wish to make a law that you understand the law-making process of the regulatory body that will enact that law. Not all cities follow the same process. Neither do the states. Once you understand how the process works, you can identify the best way for you to make an impact.

Best Practices:

1. You can find policymakers that will partner with you and support your cause. They can help negotiate on your behalf and can submit proposed laws and amendments. They can rally their party to support your legislation and can help you with other legislators that need reassurance and even help you form an action plan.
2. Do your research! Know your policymakers, how they vote, the issues they care about, and be relatable. Speak to them in their language. This will help you stand out and will make them want to help you.
3. Ask for Help! Use all your available resources. USOLMT has resources and connections with others who can help you navigate this process. If we don't know the answer, we will find someone who does.
4. Know when your legislators meet, and the basic path legislation takes to reach your Governor. Understand that each state is different. Contact us if you need help!
5. Create an issue brief and know the facts and your talking points. It's important to rehearse these and to stay focused on your goal. You want to get your point across quickly, usually within 3 minutes or less and emphasize the fact that you are a constituent and speaking on behalf of massage industry professionals.
6. Give your legislators a handout to review after your meeting and record their position, viewpoints, and any other comments you feel are important.
7. Be sure to follow up after a few days to answer any questions and reiterate your points.
8. The best time to introduce yourself to your elected officials is before issues come up, and to build those relationships now. You want your legislators to think of you and consider your input when making decisions. Do this via video call. They need to see your face.

How to Engage with the Government:

When lobbying lawmakers, someone the lawmaker knows can have an outsized influence. Next come constituents. Find colleagues who know the lawmaker personally or are represented by that lawmaker to speak with them on your behalf or to accompany you. Initiating relationships with your lawmakers can be as simple as a phone call or an e-mail. You could also request a meeting or a Zoom call with the policymaker or their staff. When engaging, you want to let them know who you are, what you do, and what is important to you. Sharing your story creates a personal, human connection with your legislator. Address both sides of the issue and speak to your legislator's values to gain agreement. USOLMT can provide you with issue briefs to assist you in this process.

You'll want to employ the following methods when engaging with elected officials:

- A clear and direct message – Condense your message down into a strong and powerful narrative
- A clear and direct ask – What is important to you that the elected official has the ability to influence?
- Evidence and data-driven arguments – we can help you find the data you need to present your argument effectively
- Collective Input from Industry Professionals that are directly impacted
- Your personal story
- Ask them how they will vote

Steps You Can Take:

The first step in being an advocate for yourself and your industry is getting involved! We all come from different backgrounds and have different understandings of the legislative process. We are here to help you become a strong, knowledgeable advocate.

1. Talk to the experts - Before deciding to support or oppose any proposed law, call your association's government relations person to discuss it and help you understand the implications of the proposal. Sometimes what looks good may do harm and what looks harmful may be good. You want to be sure you fully understand the implications. For example, adding that "sexual activity is prohibited" to the scope of practice sounds good on the surface, but, that language really belongs in unprofessional conduct.
2. Pick up the phone or send an email to the sponsor of the law – that's usually the person who introduces it into the law-making process – to schedule a time to talk about the legislation / regulation. Have a non-confrontational conversation. Often you can stop a proposed law from being introduced just by having a heart-to-heart with the lawmaker behind it. It helps them save face if you do it right. You can also have an opportunity to shape the law early on, and the lawmaker will view you as an expert. If you jump in by having everyone call the lawmaker right away without having that conversation first, it can irritate them and cause them to be less amenable to negotiation.

3. Communicate with and educate other colleagues. First, educate them on the impacts of the proposal so that they understand why you are for or against the proposed law. Ask your colleagues for support. There truly is power in numbers. The more you become aware of and act on proposed laws that affect our industry, the more your voice is amplified, and the further your ideas travel.
4. We can create action alerts that can be sent to your colleagues, coworkers, clients, and friends in the industry. When sending out an action alert to others, include a note as to why acting is important and why your colleagues should act with urgency. USOLMT may employ Action Network to serve this purpose.
5. You can create and share social media posts and graphics on your personal, business, and group pages to share information with others in the industry. Making videos and having live sessions are even more impactful.
6. You can testify at public hearings conducted by your state or local governments. The best way to influence policymakers is to do so long before any hearing. Find out who makes the decisions and a little about their background. Can you frame the issue in a way that speaks to that individual? Also, can you identify colleagues who know the lawmaker personally and are willing to talk to them? Have a personal conversation with them. Find out what they think about the proposal. Do they understand the impact on massage therapists? Also, target them with communications from your colleagues via phone and email. When making these contacts, it is very important to be personable, non-confrontational, and polite. Remember, you attract more bees with honey! If a proposed law makes it past the phase of being introduced, attend the meeting or hearing and testify as a licensed professional or member of the massage industry. You may have to sign up or make a request to testify at the hearing or meeting. Your voice can be extremely powerful when testifying in front of lawmakers on behalf the massage industry.

The massage industry directly impacts communities at the local level, and the laws concerning massage therapy at all levels directly impacts your reach, your clients, and what happens in your treatment room.

The companies that massage therapists work for, especially the major corporations, are lobbying governments constantly to advance their positions. We do not have the money these corporations have, but we have our voice, and that is our most powerful tool. Workers in these corporations, especially, need to start voicing their personal stories and their views to state and local policymakers.

Over time, we hope to create a full resource library to assist you in advocating for yourselves and for each other. Look for our Issue Briefs, coming soon the members resource section on our website, www.usolmt.com and our advocacy workshops for massage therapists in 2022.

If you are a member of a different professional association such as AMTA or ABMP, we encourage you to contact their Government Relations team to find out about the work they are doing on your behalf and to express your viewpoints directly to those associations. This is the only way to ensure that they hear your voice and your concerns. USOLMT will continue to do outreach to other associations as necessary to implore them to act in the interest of massage therapists in the profession based on the input that we have received.