United States Organization of Licensed Massage Therapists (USOLMT) Phoenix, Arizona Phone: 602-730-6356 usoImt@gmail.com



Dear Mr. Sweeney,

I am writing to address several issues we have going on in our massage therapy community and a couple of issues that I have experienced personally that involve members of your association.

When Covid started, I was still a member of ABMP. At that time, I reached out to Darren Beauford regarding putting a video project together with input from massage therapists. I thought it would be a great public awareness video, as our profession was shut down, to remind the public that we were here and ready to serve them upon our return to work. I was told that ABMP did not have the budget.

Later, I spoke with Jed in a Zoom meeting to discuss the issues I had collected from Massage Therapists over a period of three months, which I took the time to sort out into categories and made plans to address. It was a seven-page long spreadsheet that took a lot of time to complete. I did not mind sharing it with Jed at the time, as I thought perhaps ABMP would begin to address some of these problems. I also attached a series of questions that people in my USOLMT group had been asking regarding the major massage associations. Jed said he would get back to me, but I never received a response.

I have not received any direct communication from ABMP since I shared three months of my work with your staff and asked a few questions for clarification. Jed suggested that I set up a meeting with Laura Embleton regarding the legislative issues my group was discussing as were looking to find solutions to long-standing problems in massage. That has not happened yet, even though I e-mailed her to introduce myself many months ago. I got no response. Your association's silence is deafening, as no response is a response. I know many people who work with your association been watching my work over the last year, as Leslie Young has been a member of my USOLMT group since it began.

I have referred many people to ABMP over AMTA in the last year, as insurance coverage from AMTA seemed sorely lacking in Covid-19 protection for massage therapists. I enjoyed my membership with ABMP. As a spa worker, I was not able to take advantage of many of the benefits or discounts you offered, even though I was a Certified Member. I needed different types of benefits that were not being offered anywhere in the profession.

I would like to address Darren's "lack of budget" response. As an association that is not required to divulge your finances, we can still gather here on the outside that your association makes at least tens of millions of dollars each year in revenue on massage therapists and other beauty professionals. I am going to counter that response with the actions I have taken to assist massage therapists with ZERO budget. In the last year, I have spent about \$500.00 of my personal unemployment funds assisting massage therapists. I have talked them through issues over the phone, I have purchased a few

programs to hold virtual meetings, create my website, and design my graphics and I've reached out to massage therapists organically on social media. I started my podcast with zero dollars – a cell phone, a free program, and my computer. I have started planning the work on a documentary with the response of over 100 massage therapists to address Sexual Solicitation in Massage Therapy. We have no budget for this project, but we can put the whole thing together without one, as all it takes is a little video production and editing knowledge, stitching capability, time, and a computer to process it. These projects are easy now – not long and complicated and bureaucratic.

I would also like to address some of the personal viewpoints of your members and how they have affected me personally in recent weeks, as these "viewpoints" came to me in the most unprofessional way possible in public forums on the internet. As an association that touts the professionalism of your membership, I think you need to address this and think long and hard about your stance on the profession.

These two gathered their colleagues and spent three days berating me for discussing diversity in massage therapy. I must ask myself why they thought that was necessary or how they thought their comments would assist. These two not only sent me their "guidance" but also their assumptions and those of their colleagues against me. As we all work to address the issues in massage therapy, these two decided that I needed to pay people to chat with me. I suppose I can understand why they would suggest this, considering that they are charging people for classes to learn about diversity and people are paying for them. I facilitated a discussion with zero budget. The therapists that participated in the discussion all had something to say, and each one of them brought their hearts and minds with them to speak on this issue, and it was all free of charge and free of payment. We are giving back to our massage community at USOLMT, not capitalizing on tragedies. I hope at some point, your membership base comes to understand that.

I would also like to address your response to the Atlanta spa shootings that occurred this week. Now, you say that you are our advocate, right? As our advocate, your statement a few years ago with AMTA about human trafficking is disturbing to me, and, as our advocate, your response to the tragedy in Atlanta is also mind-boggling. You completely ignored the elephant in the room and went directly to racism. I have heard from **Atlanta is also mind-boggling**, an organization that I know ABMP has supported and lifted in recent years. Both have stated that there is not any proof that these spas were selling sex. To that, I say, come on, are you serious? No legitimate massage business in the United States of America is open 24 hours and has that many red flags. NOT ONE.

It is surprising to me after having **Constitution** on your podcast that a week later you would turn around and take the stance that "there isn't any proof, so we just don't know." Yes, we do, you just do not seem to want to address it! By changing the narrative to racism, it satisfies the American paradigm that has been fueling hatred in our nation for the last 200 or so years. It also covers the Asian community of sex workers who have been practicing under the guise of massage. It is a travesty that these women were killed, but, please, stop denying the reason the shooter said he murdered them. He was trying to eliminate sex workers, who practice under the guise of massage, and he could have gone crazy and attempted to eliminate any one of us, as our profession has been sexualized since forever and we haven't had any assistance in combating that problem.

Years of taking the stance that Human Trafficking has nothing to do with massage therapy and does not need to be addressed has led us to where we are. Years of advocating for legislation that connects

massage therapy to sex work has led us here. Years of trying to deny the sex industry exists and we are all tangled up with it has led us here. This place is a community in chaos, fear, anxiety, mourning, and we are angry and fed up with ignoring the issues that are blatantly in our face day after day. I implore you, stop ignoring the elephant in the room. What worked last year is not going to continue to work as we move forward. Our world is forever changed, and your association needs to acknowledge that and change too.

Massage therapists really do "expect more" in terms of advocacy, service, and solutions. It is not just a tagline. It is a mindset that you have put out there in the world, and it is boomeranging. What you believe that massage therapists like me need, is not what we need at all. We need Associations that support us and give us a break when the chips are down. We need you to fight for us and continue to advocate for us, but we need you to do that based on what we need, not what you think we need.

The issues of sex buyers, prostitution and human trafficking affect every single one of us every day. By continuing to ignore it, you turn your back on your members and the massage community at large – the very community that you say you are advocating for. By continuing to perpetuate the race narrative, you sweep the elephant back under the rug. Asian massage therapists are a true minority in the Legitimate Massage Profession. They are a majority in the Sex Disguised as Massage Therapy Profession. And, while I hurt for these victims and their families, I cannot believe that our major associations are going to pull out the race card and not address the real and valid concerns of the massage profession. We are in danger. What are you going to do about it?

I started USOLMT because we were out here in the weeds trying to figure out how to go back to work with deadly virus with no guidance. Now, we are out here in the weeds again trying to figure out how to process this tragedy while you tell us not to talk about it and hold our comments. You know that is not going to happen. Instead, I suggest that you use some of your millions of dollars and address every facet of this situation. That is what needs to happen.

I am doing everything I can with zero dollars and unemployment funds, and it is making an impact, finally, but it is going to take YEARS to build the type of power and financial backing that we need to overcome these things on our own and you know it. I would like to see someone with some real power act right now and make the right moves to protect massage therapists.

Regards,

Stephanie Rodriguez, LMT Executive Director, USOLMT www.usolmt.com