

United States Organization of Licensed Massage Therapists
(USOLMT)

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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 we 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 have 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

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
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