

United States Organization of Licensed Massage Therapists
(USOLMT)

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Dear Mr. Albertson,

I am writing to address several issues we have going on in our massage therapy community. I would like to see a response from AMTA on these issues.

I am a former member of AMTA. I purchased the membership right after massage school graduation and held my membership for just over two years. At that time, I switched to ABMP due to their options in Continuing Education that were free of charge to their members, a difference that I needed as an employee in the massage industry who was not able to afford continuing education courses provided by AMTA. I was looking for a quick job at the time because I had just moved. I applied at a local Massage Envy. Although I had just purchased a full year of my ABMP Certified Membership, the manager at the Massage Envy told me that I could not work there unless I cancelled my ABMP insurance and purchased AMTA insurance. This was when I realized the extent of AMTA's partnership with Massage Envy, which I wanted no part of, so, I turned down the position and moved on.

AMTA having a partnership with Massage Envy does not seem like the best way to move our profession forward, in my opinion. As a franchise and spa worker for my entire massage career, I struggled to make ends meet and experienced horrific treatment in all my massage jobs. Massage Therapy was a second career for me, and I entered in from a 20-Year corporate background. I was appalled at the disdain that franchise owners had for their staff and their lack of understanding of what we do, and the ways in which they continued to push us to see clients, even if they were not the right fit for us, made us uncomfortable by being sexually suggestive, and complained about our services as if we weren't even human, while the managers at these places wrote us up for it. As a Non-Profit that wants massage therapists to believe you have our best interests in mind, I have real concerns about this partnership.

I started my massage organization, USOLMT, during the Covid-19 lockdowns to assist workers. I worked on a project with about 25 massage employees and one business owner in Santa Clara County, California. They wanted to return to work, and even though I knew I would not be taking that stance, I agreed to help them file a petition with their state and county officials. I reached out the AMTA chapter local to them but did not receive any response. I wondered why the local chapter would not want to assist employees who were hurting and needing to return to work. I still have no answers.

I noticed a real gap in our major associations during this time and decided to fill it, by directly advocating massage employees and exploring the wider challenges we face as Massage Therapists and the solutions we could provide to those challenges. It seems that the long-standing leaders of our massage profession are stuck in old ways of doing things and old ways of thinking, and yet our world is evolving and changing.

I spoke with some of the people who started the Massage Advocacy Project in Oregon many years ago, who were looking to Unionize massage therapy workers. During those conversations, I was told that AMTA stepped in after they lost their funding from Working America and told them that AMTA would advocate for the workers. One question – how is partnering with Massage Envy advocating for the workers, exactly? The wage floor has not been raised in over 10 years for massage therapists. I was offered \$15.00 per service at Massage Envy, four years into my massage career, after working for a 5-diamond luxury resort as one of their highest paid employees. It was laughable to me that they would offer me that little and then tell me I also had to cancel my current insurance and switch associations.

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 have 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 facilitated a diversity 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 or ignoring them. I am very surprised AMTA has not released any statement about the tragedy that just occurred in Atlanta, but, then again, I was also very surprised at the amount of time it took AMTA to also release anything in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

I would like to address 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 ABMP about human trafficking is disturbing to me, and, as our advocate, no response to the tragedy in Atlanta is also mind-boggling. We can no longer ignore the elephant in the room. No legitimate massage business in the United States of America is open 24 hours and has that many red flags. NOT ONE.

ABMP responded with challenging racism. 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, if AMTA does finally respond to this tragedy, do not deny 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 have not 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 need more in terms of advocacy, service, and solutions. 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 our profession, 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 perpetuating the race narrative, you sweep the elephant back under the rug, so, please do not. 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, we need AMTA to 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 a deadly virus with no guidance. Now, we are out here in the weeds again trying to figure out how to process this tragedy while AMTA does not respond. Instead, I suggest that you use some of your millions of dollars of yearly revenue to 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. I would like to see someone with some real power act right now and make the right moves to protect massage therapists.

Regards,

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