

# What's in a name? For art therapists, maintaining the integrity of profession

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For a profession called upon to work with traumatized children, veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the mentally disabled and a variety of other vulnerable populations, art therapists are held oddly unaccountable by the state of Ohio.

Legislation proposed last week seeks to amend that situation by enacting statewide certification of art therapists. House Bill 587, introduced by Rep. Jim McGregor, R-Gahanna, reflects an ongoing national debate for a relatively new professional struggling to define itself.

The Buckeye Art Therapy Association approached Rep. McGregor about creating legislation that would prohibit untrained people, specifically those who merely learned about art therapy through workshops, from advertising themselves as art therapists, a profession that takes years to learn and is technically contingent on licensure from the American Art Therapy Association.

"This is so the consumers will know that this person truly is an art therapist," said Gretchen Miller, a Cleveland-area art therapist and BATA board member.

Art therapy is a master's or doctoral level mental health profession that uses the creation of art in assessment and treatment of mental illnesses. According to BATA, education and training requirements are comparable to those for clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, and mental health counselors.

However, McGregor's legislation requires that art therapists be certified by the State of Ohio Counselor, Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist Board, a lumping-in that does not bode well for the future of the profession, according to art therapy specialist Laura Kunze of the Ohio State University Medical Center.

"Certainly, it's not a bad idea at all, but I want to know what the next step is going to be. We need to get the licensure without losing our identity as art therapists," said Kunze. "Art therapy is different from counseling so we need to determine long-term, strategically if this makes sense."

As well as protecting the consumer from false advertising, McGregor said the legislation assures health care providers that only nationally accredited art therapists use the title.

According to the BATA, recognition of the official art therapy credentials provides Ohio's hospitals, clinics, and consumers with the necessary information to make an informed choice about their therapy needs.

Art therapy emerged in 1930s as a distinct profession that offers a method of communication less confrontational and more child-friendly than verbal therapy. The profession has found a home in Ohio with multiple training programs and the fifth largest art therapist population in the country, according to the American Art Therapy Association.

"Art therapy is very big in Ohio. We've sort of reached a critical mass of art therapists, which is why we need the title protection in the state," said Miller.