



Arizona Governor Signs State Hiring and Title Protection Bill for Art Therapists into Law: A Chapter's Journey

AATA

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On Monday evening, May 1, Arizona Governor Douglas Ducey signed SB 1434, *art therapy services; contracting requirements*, into law. The bill authorizes the state to contract with art therapists who hold active art therapy certification for services provided through the state mental hospital, the state's program of services for persons with disabilities, and state supported hospitals. Additionally, it defines art therapy for purposes of state law and provides title protection to prevent anyone other than those holding national credentials as art therapists from calling themselves art therapists.

This success for the art therapy profession is thanks to the hard and dedicated work by the [Arizona Art Therapy Association](#) (AZATA). AZATA President Margaret Carlock-Russo, Ed.D, LCAT (NY), ATR-BC, reflects on the highs and lows of the experience and shares what she's learned about advocacy along the way.

The Initial Steps: Gathering the Chapter and Submitting the Sunrise Review Application

At first, Margaret describes the whole process as “long, grueling, and a bit daunting.” But she quickly follows that statement with gratitude. Once she engaged in the advocacy process, she was inspired by all the people who helped her along the way. She especially thanks: the rest of her chapter's board and chapter members who testified; other chapters that shared information from when they pursued similar legislations, especially Connecticut, Colorado, and Vermont; legislators and staff in Arizona who guided her through various legal formalities; and the AATA, whose team went above and beyond in the rapid provision of drafts and data when the chapter was in time crunches and without whose support, “we would not have gotten the bill in.”

The journey leading to this week's event was long and included many players. The chapter began to organize and conduct research to introduce a licensure bill back in 2014, before Margaret was personally involved. The first step in her journey was preparing an application for sunrise review to be submitted by September 1, 2016. The chapter worked closely with the AATA to develop a 51-page application, providing a variety of information about art therapy and justifying why the licensure bill is necessary. The chapter submitted the application to a joint Committee made up of members of the Senate and House Health Committees. The Committee had through December to provide feedback, at which point it was made clear that a licensing bill, of any profession, would likely not be approved. The Arizona legislature, like many other states, is reluctant to authorize new licenses out of concern for state costs, expanding government regulation, and limiting access to employment opportunities.

At this point, the experience of other state chapters proved helpful, as AZATA amended their application. The chapter worked with the Committee to develop the contracting provisions, provide a definition describing an appropriate scope of practice for art therapy, and provide for title protection for use of the term “art therapist.” A major concern in proposing a licensing bill in Arizona had been that a number of state and local agencies had been hiring people as art therapists who did not have the appropriate training.

Personal Connections: Scheduling Meetings and Testifying at Hearings

On December 16, the State held a hearing. Margaret and other chapter leaders and members testified for over an hour, answering questions about the efficacy of art therapy. To Margaret’s surprise, the Committee voted at the end of the hearing. With a vote of six to three, the chapter went home knowing they had passed the sunrise review. This was already an incredible accomplishment, as few applications are favorably reviewed the first time they are submitted. During the hearing, Arizona Republican Senator Nancy Barto, who served as chair in the sunrise review Committee, indicated interest in sponsoring a bill.



(From left) AZATA members who testified in the Senate Building (Board roles listed reflect the date of the photo): Rory Schmitt, Past President and AZATA Board Member; Margaret Carlock-Russo, President-Elect and 2017 President; Jodi Gonzales, Secretary; Eden Wenda, AZATA Member; Lanie Smith, AZATA Member; Sally Markley, President; Natalie DeFay, AZATA Member and candidate for 2017 President-Elect; Joyous Williams, Past President and AZATA Member.

Margaret emphasizes that the number one lesson she learned about advocacy was to “make personal connections – and lots of them!” The chapter had a surprisingly easy time finding a sponsor, as Senator Barto had already expressed interest on her own. AZATA followed up with her and was on its way. Margaret and other members of the Board began to rally their team,

holding webinars and calls to action. The advocates scheduled meetings and calls with Senators and staff to prepare for the Senate Committee of Health and Human Services hearing, scheduled for February 15.

This Senate Committee hearing was a prime example of the importance of persistence in the frustrating formalities that can be part of advocacy. Although most of the chapter Board members were located in Tuscon, AZ, the hearing was scheduled two hours away, in Phoenix, AZ. The hearing started at 2:00 p.m., but there was no indication of when the bill would be heard. By the time Margaret was called to testify at 7:50 p.m., the other three art therapists who joined her in Phoenix, had already gone home. Margaret was given three minutes to testify and then answered a few questions. She compares the experience to “waiting at the DMV without a ticket.” To her delight, the vote passed, and the bill made it to round two; it would be heard by the entire Senate. The bill passed the Senate floor on February 23, with a vote of twenty-four to six.

Passing the House Health Committee proved to be more challenging. During the hearing on March 23, Margaret and Natalie Defay Foster, LAMFT, AZATA President-Elect, found themselves answering very basic questions about what art therapy is, information they had been diligently distributing to each Representative’s office for months. The chapter put out more calls to action and Natalie spent a full day at the Capitol visiting the offices of the nine Representatives that agreed to meet. Despite the doubt the chapter felt, their efforts paid off and the Committee passed the bill with a vote of five to one. After that hearing, the bill was passed through the House Rules Committee, the House Committee of the Whole, the House (Third Reading) and was transmitted back to the Senate in order to approve an amendment. The bill passed the Third Reading of the Senate on April 25, with a vote of twenty-seven to one.

The Final Steps: the Governor’s Approval and Community Education

The chapter rallied one last time and contacted the Governor’s policy advisors. Although the chapter is celebrating the approval of this bill, they acknowledge that there is still more work to be done. They will need to educate employers about the existence of the bill and educate other professionals that they can no longer call their work “art therapy” if they lack the qualifying credentials.

Margaret’s takeaway message from the whole experience is, “You have to make personal connections with however many people you can. Even if it’s over the phone, that is also a great resource. They will not do the research on their own.”

AZATA offers its support and experience to any chapter interested in pursuing similar legislation. The help they received from other chapters was invaluable, and they are committed to be that resource for others. To read more about the details and history of their bill, visit the [Arizona State Legislature](#) website or [LegiScan](#).



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