



amta
american **massage** therapy association®

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April 3, 2020

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor of Ohio
Riffe Center, 30th Floor,
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor DeWine,

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised a variety of confusing and challenging questions for the massage therapy community. Driven by the best available research, massage therapists, the massage therapy profession and our advocates have fought diligently at both the state and federal levels of government for massage professionals to be recognized by states as essential healthcare practitioners in our nation's healthcare system. At this critical time, many massage therapists employed by essential providers have chosen to be part of the solution and stay safe at home, in the best interest of public health. Unemployment and other small business benefits have become critical. Others are still deemed essential by their employers and are working, but are asking about the safety of their workplace environments. As the authority to make these determinations is afforded to state governments we kindly request clarity on essential versus non-essential healthcare during this pandemic.

- Please provide clarity on where massage therapists fit into your current definition of essential service.
- Is it the intention or recommendation of your administration to have "essential healthcare" workers continue to function in environments that do not have the proper PPE or protocols in place to ensure the safety of the public and care givers?

We thank you for your time and consideration of our points. Please feel free to reach out should you have any questions or need clarity.
Be safe and we wish you well.

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Background on this issue:

The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) recognizes that state regulations describing what is considered an “essential” versus “non-essential” service differ between states and jurisdictions. We all recognize the great need for all healthcare providers to safely practice during this unprecedented period of time.

Essential healthcare providers, in every state, are choosing to temporarily close their practices in a combined, cumulative effort to flatten the COVID-19 curve. As we collectively navigate this pandemic, we need to recognize that the term essential, not only has a new meaning, but should be defined by those charged with coordinating the care of patients across the country namely, primary care providers (PCP) with prescriptive authority.

We recognize that “essential healthcare” in the immediate future will almost exclusively be care that meets an urgent and life-threatening need/standard. The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has made several crucial recommendations on its [website](#), detailing COVID-19 symptoms, testing procedures and guidelines for when a patient should seek medical attention from his or her healthcare provider.

Massage therapists, in addition to a majority of clearly defined and recognized essential healthcare providers, understand that it is impossible to guarantee the safety of all of their patients without a full supply of personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE consists of masks, eye protection, gowns and gloves which are increasingly scarce and, in the best interests of the health of our communities, reserved for first responders and in-hospital personnel.

Without adequate PPE, safe environments or care coordinated through a PCP, AMTA offers the following considerations:

- The ability to limit the spread between provider and patient relies on access to PPEs. With these units in scarce/limited supply, it is far more productive to allow available units in your state to be utilized for essential healthcare and emergency responders on the frontline of this fight.
- Massage therapists do work in clinical settings where treatment is medically necessary and ordered by a physician. The safety of the practitioner and the patient needs to be of the utmost priority, particularly when treating our most vulnerable populations.
- Screening clients for recent illnesses or known exposure to COVID-19 is not a reliable method, as the numbers of asymptomatic carriers’ increases.

Massage therapists are an essential part of the wider Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation healthcare community. We need to ensure the health and safety of massage

therapy practitioners; just as our patients/clients will rely on their abilities to heal from our current state of trauma, illnesses, and anxiety.

AMTA has been reaching out to each state, and our federal government, to convey how much this crisis has economically crippled our industry, like many others, as the overwhelming majority of the 360,000 massage therapists in this country are out of work either by government mandate or by choosing to follow CDC guideline and not wanting to contribute to this pandemic by working in an unsafe environment. We request that considerations be made, when it comes to unemployment and other small business benefits for those who are still deemed essential, or are employed by essential providers, and chose to be part of the solution and stay safe at home in the best interests of public health.

Massage is and will continue to be an essential therapy for our nation's health. And when we come out on the other side of this pandemic we will be there for our communities and those that have diligently navigated us through this crisis, be it physician burnout, stress, PTSD, pain or any of the other ailments for which a wealth of research shows massage is effective.

Sincerely,



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