

President's Message

Laura Aho Jodry – President of RAA

Last month I received an invitation to attend a meeting facilitated by the American Massage Therapy Association's Massachusetts Chapter (AMTA-MA). The invitations were sent out to area schools and wellness centers along with a few bodywork organizations. The AMTA is once again attempting to go for a licensing law in Massachusetts for massage therapists.

Many of you have had the opportunity to work with - or even against - your state massage associations. And as with those dealings, this issue in Massachusetts will assuredly follow a similar track. You know the path: massage attempts to collect as many body therapies as possible under its umbrella to increase their numbers on paper, which in turn can help them get their bill passed. So here we go in Massachusetts again as has happened in many states all over the country. Time to fight the big fight, standing up for Reflexology's autonomy.

I contacted the folks in the newly formed Massachusetts Association of Reflexology to tell them the news and offered to submit a Reflexology position paper at the meeting. The position paper was decided with the help of the RAA Legislative committee. Basically it states Reflexology's wish for a formal written exemption in the Bill's wording and once that is written into the Bill, reflexologists will be happy to assist the massage profession of Massachusetts toward its goal of licensure.

Two weeks later I found myself at this first coalition AMTA-MA meeting with a Reflexology position paper tucked neatly into my notebook, just waiting for the opportune moment to present. Listening carefully to the professional lobbyist while she explained how the Massachusetts legislature works, I remember thinking I was getting a great free education into legislation and being thankful to the AMTA-MA for the opportunity. Once her presentation was complete, she opened the floor to a bit of Q & A.

Folks did have some basic questions about the coalition and how it's run, but soon questions turned into comments; no ... actually, declarations. For instance, a representative from the Trager® field was quick to present a formal verbal statement that Trager® wants no part in this bill and desires exclusion. Aha! Someone had opened the door and the opportune moment for the position paper had arrived. I then raised my hand and introduced myself to the lobbyist and the AMTA Laws Committee stating Reflexology's desire for formal written exemption and presenting the position paper.

I explained that Reflexology is simply requesting that the Massachusetts branch of the AMTA follow the guidelines set forth by the national AMTA's Government Relations Committee, which recommends that states make a formal exclusion for Reflexology when introducing or changing a massage bill.

Well, things got interesting after other disciplines offered similar positions, though verbally - not formally-written. Out poured questions from Trager® reps, Alexander Technique reps, Asian Bodywork organizations and even the American Massage and Bodywork Profession group. Strangely, the questions were not directed toward the AMTA or the lobbyist - they were directed at the Reflexology community. Folks were truly interested in hearing the thoughts, opinions and position of Reflexology on this Bill. The reflexologists in attendance at this meeting were myself, Val Voner and Jack Rosso (both RAA members, Reflexology school owners and practitioners).

After we answered some direct questions regarding our position on this issue, I politely transferred the queries toward the massage group and the lobbyist. The meeting then went on and the AMTA said they have not started revising the wording and that anyone interested in insuring the wording works for their modality is invited to join the coalition. Ah yes, politics. So here we go in Massachusetts.

After the meeting, I was sure to sign on to the coalition and to express my desire to help the AMTA and insure Reflexology's role (exemption) in the process. The committee seemed, well ... let's say somewhat re-signed to my offer rather than pleased. OK, I thought - this day down and however many more to go. So I gathered my things and started for the door. Now I thought the day had been full of surprises thus far, but incredibly there were more to come.

I was approached by the Trager® reps, the AMBP, Alexander reps and the Asian Bodywork reps, all wanting to know how Reflexology does it, what it has in place and if they can use our professional organization as a model. They wanted information on how to form state associations and develop watchdog techniques toward the massage industry. Other folks wanted to know where they could train in Reflexology as they'd heard of its efficacy. Everyone I spoke with knew Reflexology was not massage.

So I talked for a while, answered more questions and set up a few connections before heading back to work and the comfort and serenity of working on clients. At the end of my working day, I thought about the events from the meeting and was heartened at the sizable impact Reflexology's presence had made during and after the meeting. I felt proud to be part of a discipline that is admired by others and felt comforted in the knowledge that the Reflexology community is respected by many of its peer groups. Other disciplines see Reflexology as a profession - imagine? - one that has all its 'ducks in a row'; and they wish to actually be where we are in the overall scheme of things. What an eye opener! Sometimes you have to look in from the outside, in this case through the eyes of other disciplines, in order to see all that there is to see. Reflexology looks good from out there.

And I wanted to pass this positive experience on to you. It is my hope that you realize we are respected and admired. The effort through the years made on behalf of Reflexology, by reflexologists, is astounding. We do have our 'ducks in a row'. We have

a national certification board and accreditation board. We have state associations and of course, RAA. We gather as a community behind issues that affect our field. We work as individuals, but we also work as a community. We are professional and Reflexology is worthy of the praise I heard it given that day.

Though we sometimes feel it's a never-ending battle (up hill; in the snow -without shoes) toward a true profession, it is good to remember that Reflexology has come a long way from where it began. Everyone involved, whether practitioner, teacher, client, board member, or volunteer, has had a hand in creating this beautiful picture. So take a moment and sit back - forget for a second where we are going - and look at where we are! Admire yourself as well as the beauty of our community. Continue the climb toward the future, but along the way, stop to look back over the panorama behind you. Look at all you've done. Look at all we've done!

Be content that reflexology does not have all the answers yet, but be inspired by your passion to find them. Be proud in its existence. Nurture Reflexology as it is now. Don't wait for its approval as a profession to come in the form of clinical trials noting its efficacy, or from a state approving licensure, or from insurance company acceptance, or from anything else. The connection, the validation, the growth of our profession and ourselves comes from our individual and collective spirit. Let that be your inspiration and your energy source. Use that energy to continue building a strong foundation for Reflexology. We've built our castle in the clouds. That's ok; that's where it should be. Now let's put a foundation under it!