

2025 Legislative Session Reflections: A Pivotal Year for Utah's Massage Therapy Profession

By Roger Olbrot

When asked about my work as a massage therapist, I often speak not only of clinical practice, but also of the advocacy that safeguards the integrity and future of our profession. Among the many roles I've embraced over the years, one of the most rewarding has been serving as a vigilant steward of the laws and rules that govern massage therapy in Utah. My involvement with legislative processes dates back to 2000, and the 2025 session proved to be one of the most consequential in recent memory.

To understand this year's developments, a bit of background is essential. Our Massage Practice Act was up for its sunset review—a routine but critical milestone in which the Legislature decides whether a profession should continue to be regulated. Without reauthorization, we risked losing our legal standing as a licensed profession. The Office of Professional Licensure Review (OPLR) was tasked with evaluating our statute, including our scope of practice, educational requirements, and professional standards. Based on surveys and input from various stakeholders—including industry representatives, licensed massage therapists, and the public—OPLR proposed significant revisions to our governing law.

As the proposed legislation advanced to the House Business and Labor Committee, a last-minute amendment introduced a new classification: the "Registered Massage Therapist." This designation required only basic contact information and a nominal fee to perform massage—virtually eliminating any meaningful educational standards or competency requirements. Naturally, this raised deep concerns about public safety and professional credibility.

The Utah Board of Massage Therapy convened an emergency session, joined for the first hour by Representative Norm Thurston of Provo, the bill's sponsor. To his credit, Representative Thurston welcomed feedback and listened as we detailed our objections to the proposed tier. The Board submitted a list of recommended revisions—some of which were adopted, but key issues remained unresolved.

Determined to protect our profession, I, along with Bijan Hosseini, attended the Senate Business and Labor Committee hearing. We each spoke—briefly but pointedly. I addressed concerns regarding the dangerously vague scope of practice, while Bijan highlighted risks related to human and sex trafficking. The committee's vote resulted in a tie, effectively halting the bill's progress.

Tensions rose. In the lobby, Representative Thurston expressed frustration, believing he had incorporated all of our feedback. To de-escalate the situation, he invited Bijan and me into a private chamber behind the House floor. What followed was an extraordinary two-hour dialogue in which we discussed, clarified, and ultimately aligned on several critical elements: the need for educational pathways, a clearly defined scope of practice, and licensure requirements for massage establishments to combat illicit activity.

With renewed collaboration, we began crafting a new legislative framework. Within hours, we were coordinating with stakeholders across the spectrum: supporters, skeptics, investigators, and representatives from DOPL and OPLR. By mid-afternoon, we had shaped the foundation for an entirely new bill. That evening, Representative Thurston forwarded our collective recommendations to the state's legislative attorneys, and by 10:30 p.m., we were reviewing draft language. A final version was completed and released just an hour and a half before the Senate committee reconvened the following Monday.

When the bill was reintroduced, Tiffany Crofts, Bijan, and I sat beside Representative Thurston as he presented the revised legislation. Each of us affirmed our support with a clear thumbs-up. The committee passed the bill unanimously. It sailed through both the Senate and the House with similarly strong support and was ultimately signed into law by the governor on the final day of the session.

This legislation marks a new chapter for massage therapy in Utah. Most notably:

- There are now three pathways to become a Massage Assistant: completion of a massage therapy program, a structured apprenticeship, or passing a proficiency exam to enter the hands-on portion of training.
- The scope of practice for assistants has been explicitly defined: they may not work in healthcare environments or engage in rehabilitative or corrective treatments.
- A new requirement for the licensure of massage establishments will help address and prevent human and sex trafficking in our communities.

As we now move into the next phase—writing the administrative rules that will give full effect to the new statute—I feel an immense sense of pride. This legislation is a meaningful victory for public safety, professional standards, and the credibility of massage therapy in Utah.

Let us continue to remain engaged, vigilant, and unified as we uphold the integrity of our profession.