

HOUSE PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE COMMITTEE  
INFORMATIONAL MEETING ON HOUSE BILL 1356  
AUGUST 8, 2023  
TESTIMONY: Kelly Jones, MA

Chairman Burns, Chairman Metzger, and members of the Pennsylvania House Licensure Committee:

My name is Kelly Jones, and I have been a huge advocator of music therapy for over 15 years. When I was a teenager, my dad oversaw the Creative Arts program at Wesley Spectrum, and worked closely with Katie Harrill, MT-BC and creative arts program supervisor. He invested a lot of time in this program. I started volunteering with Katie where I would sit one on one with a client who loved music therapy, but also preferred to do her own thing. I made sure she was safe while she participated with the group or read her book.

I learned so much watching Katie work with kids that no other programs would take. She never turned down a child who had been labeled as "challenging", no matter their history. Some kids were very physically aggressive. Katie has been bitten, spit on, punched, kicked, you name it. She never gave up. For some of her clients, that's all they needed - was to not be given up on. Katie used a lot of techniques, very quickly. In my master's program, I finally learned the science of her craziness (which I say lovingly). She did preference assessments so quickly that it was hard to even know what was going on. She found what her clients liked and used it to make their time more enjoyable. During sessions, she taught her clients how to communicate and how to express themselves. She gave their parents hope that their children could learn things, despite all the other professions that gave up on them. Katie would hype the clients up and help them expend some energy and she always calmed them down before the parents came to pick them up. The lights were off, the bubbles were blowing, all the kids lying down on the carpet, listening to Katie's magical piano songs. It was very relaxing! Of course, she had a different layout for every client. Sometimes, she would be teaching piano or running a group, or dancing, or singing. A lot of the time, she would just go with the flow and adjust to every single person's individual needs.

Because of this experience, I met a lot of parents of children with disabilities. It's almost like a community that you can't fully be a part of unless you have a child with disabilities. Only other parents know what it's like. Kids would run into the room so excited for music. Parents sat outside, relieved, that they had a break where they could trust their child with a professional. They looked forward to music therapy just as much as their children. Sometimes, I would walk out into the hall where parents would be crying. It's

hard, as a parent, to know that you need more support for your child. It's hard to admit it, and it's hard to find it. When I was volunteering, Katie was the only music therapist. She traveled to 3 different sides of the city, and she was in such high demand. Thankfully, she has been able to hire more therapists, and she has more interns so that more individuals can be helped. We need to support this program to reach even more families that need this service.

Fifteen years later, my dad brought me to work with him again, and we started our own residential agency where we serve adults with intellectual disability and autism. Our very first client was Michael, and he came from a psychiatric facility in Warren County. He was there because he didn't fit in with his current residential agency and he was aggressive towards his roommates and staff. After 5 months of getting to know Michael, we discovered he had a few real pleasures in life. He loved spending time with his mom, watching movies, and going out to

eat, and he *liked* going swimming. We then took him to music therapy, where we were pleasantly surprised. Michael didn't talk much about his feelings. He would get so mad where he was spitting on people or hitting them. Music therapy gave him something that he never had before in his 33 years of life- a way to express his feelings. He sang, he rapped, he wrote songs, he danced, and he performed at the annual recital. I watched him become a happier person because of music therapy. I will never forget watching him on the stage signing his favorite 80s song, Everybody Wants to Rule the World. He was proud of himself. I was so proud of him. Unfortunately, Michael passed away in 2022, but I know that he had a good life watching his movies, having his mom over for visits, and singing at music therapy.

We love bringing our clients to music therapy and currently have several enrolled. Katie, and her other therapists, find ways to work with any level of disability, which can be especially challenging with high functioning autism. My organization only accepts clients into our organization that we think that we can help. Some of my clients have a history of very challenging behaviors. Katie isn't just a therapist. She is a part of our treatment team. Music therapy is a huge part of the reason that we can be successful with our clients. My clients are learning social skills, how to regulate their emotions, and how to talk to other people. My staff are also able to see a hope spot. Direct Support Professionals can sometimes become overwhelmed with difficult behaviors, but then they see how well our clients behave at music therapy, and they get hope that our clients' negative behaviors are only temporary, which we have seen for the most part, they are.

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Music therapy is an incredibly important service that individuals with IDD need. Please vote yes on HB 1356 seeking music therapy licensure in Pennsylvania

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