

New York State Therapeutic Recreation Licensure Bill Update, July 2009 Letter Campaign A Success!

**By Vincent Bonadies, MS, CTRS
NYS TR Licensure Committee Co-Chair**

Hello everyone. I hope you are enjoying the summer. Before you know it, the leaves will be turning. Before that happens I thought I would take a few moments and update you on our efforts to get the NYS Therapeutic Licensure Bill (A8073) passed.

First I want to thank everyone who wrote to their assembly members asking them to support the bill. Special thanks to NYSTRA, several of the local TR organizations and NCTRC for getting the word out about the letter campaign. The letters and emails that were sent to our assembly members were a big success! Many RTs informed me about their efforts. I am delighted to tell you that I have recorded over 120 emails and letters to NYS assembly members and I'm sure many other assembly members were contacted without my knowing. On many occasions, the same assembly member was contacted several times about the bill. I am confident to say that if your assembly member didn't know what therapeutic recreation was, they do now. We caught their attention.

As some of you already know, many assembly members responded in support of the bill. I was forwarded assembly member Andrew Raia's reply from Karen Nash. His response read:

"Thank you for writing my office in regard to Assembly Bill A.8073, also known as the New York State Recreational therapy Licensing bill. I appreciate hearing from members of the Ninth assembly District as it is important to get community input on important issues.

Recreation therapy is a crucial component of the health care system. It is an important part of the treatment of individuals with injuries, disabilities, and chronic illnesses. Recreational therapists use a variety of therapeutic techniques to help patients develop life skills and become more involved in their communities.

There is no doubt that recreational therapy plays an important role in the care of any patient, as it is vital to improving a patient's quality of life. Thus, I believe it is critical for individuals seeking to enter the field of Recreational therapy to have the right credentials prior to licensing and to qualify for the occupation through a proper licensing system. That is why I am happy to inform you that I have signed on a prime co-sponsor of this legislation.

Again, thank you for contacting my office on this important issue. Should you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact my office directly".

What an incredible response in support of not only the bill but also of TR. I, and many of the TR Licensure Committee members, received similar letters in support of the bill. As a result Assembly members Raia, Destito and Hyer-Spencer have signed onto the bill.

However, despite all our efforts, we still have much more work ahead of us. At the present time our bill remains with the Higher Education Committee of the Assembly for their review. Assembly member Deborah Glick, the Chair of the Higher Education Committee sent me this response:

"Thank you for your letter regarding licensing of A8073 which would license recreational therapists. Licensing legislation that comes before the Higher Education Committee gets a thorough investigation as to clarity of bill drafting, effects the legislation would have on the scope of practice of other related groups of professionals, support for and opposition to the proposed licensing, and the opinion of the agency charged with regulating the new profession, the State Department of Education. Staff has not yet completed its preliminary work on this legislation.

Only when their work is completed will I be able to consider placing the bill on the agenda for a meeting of the Higher Education Committee.

I thank you for your interest in this bill. I am as interested as you are in legislation that would protect consumers and provide for real enforcement of the profession.”

In the near future we hope to meet with Assembly member Deborah Glick and convince her of the importance of getting our bill passed.

We also found out that we need to have the bill introduced by the NYS Senate. When I tell you that this endeavor has been a real learning experience, I truly mean it. It is a kind of learning as you go along process. Now that the chaos is finally over at the Senate or so I would like to think. We can begin to approach NYS Senators to sponsor the bill. So this is where I need your help. If you know of a senator that is sensitive to TR please let me or one of the committee members know. We will certainly give the senator a call.

So the journey continues. We are still hoping that the bill will be passed in 2010. That is, if we have all of our ducks lined up in a row. In the meantime if you have any questions about the bill please don't hesitate to contact either Linda or I.

Be well and thank you once again for your continued support.

Excelsior,

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