I only vaguely remember my first Hill Day experience. It was held on a bright, sunny spring day in Denver, Colorado in 2010. I was chair of the Colorado task force at the time, and Fort Collins was hosting the Midwestern region’s annual music therapy conference. Dr. Dena Register, Regulatory Affairs Associate for CBMT, had flown out to facilitate a pre-conference five hour Advocacy CMTE and Hill Day.

To be perfectly honest, I have little recollection of the meetings and interactions from that day—which is likely due to the fact that I was pre-occupied as my husband and I had decided just two days earlier to move to Missouri—but I recall my feelings from that day. My day started with an excited, nervous energy, and ended with exuberant empowerment. I have since witnessed this same transformation in dozens of other music therapy students and professionals participating in their own Hill Day events. Engaging in advocacy changes someone to a more empowered version of him- or herself, as it also changes the profession to be seen as a more recognized and understood treatment option.

These Hill Day events and advocacy meetings are foundational to the AMTA/CBMT State Recognition Operational Plan (SROP), which this year celebrates its 10 year anniversary. This joint national initiative has led to the creation of music therapy license and state certification programs in six states (Georgia, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Utah), and an ever-increasing number of bills each spring designed to formally recognize the profession and the MT-BC credential required for competent practice. These recognition successes rely heavily on grass roots advocacy efforts of state task force members and the larger community of music therapists and music therapy supporters in the state.

Advocating for the music therapy profession is a cornerstone of the state recognition process. Since its launch, the SROP has resulted in a growing number of advocacy-related initiatives, including continuing education trainings on being an advocate, social media-focused efforts, Hill Day events at state Capitol buildings, and concurrent sessions at regional and national music therapy conferences. As we pause and reflect on 10 years of the music therapy state recognition initiative, let us explore how our community has engaged in advocacy. We invite you to read stories of advocacy in action from music therapists from across the country—Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Maine, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. Some states have been participating in state recognition efforts since the 2005 launch, while other states have joined more recently. Some stories reflect actions of individual music therapists who took advantage of an advocacy opportunity that emerged. Other stories talk about legislative efforts, social media outreach, and advocacy trainings facilitated by state task force members. Taken together, these stories reflect the various ways in which successful advocacy happens, which we hope will inspire you to create and engage in your own advocacy story.
The American Music Therapy Association and the Certification Board for Music Therapists found that working directly through the states at a grassroots level for additional recognition and acceptance of board certification was necessary to improve access to quality services. Music therapists in Illinois started their recognition efforts in spring of 2006.

Initially the Illinois State Music Therapy Recognition Task Force (TF) reviewed various state agency regulatory language to identify where music therapy was listed. If the language was outdated (still listing Registration as the required credential for employment), the task force contacted the agencies to request inclusion of current professional requirements in state documents. Task force members also started contacting legislators for advice and recommendations on how best to obtain state recognition in Illinois.

Senator Carole Pankau stepped up quickly and submitted language in conjunction with the occupational therapy licensure bill. It was discussed with her that this would not be appropriate as music therapists are not occupational therapists and the language was removed. Senator Pankau voiced her commitment to helping music therapists obtain recognition and recommended the task force submit licensure language to her for presentation during the following legislative session.

The task force combed through current licensure legislation for related occupations in the state and put forth the Illinois Music Therapy Licensure Act in 2009. A Hill Day was held to advocate for this legislation. The Act was sent to the Consumer Protection Senate committee for consideration, where the language was opposed by several therapy groups and the Department of Professional Regulation. The bill was stopped at that time and did not go forward.

Taking into consideration the concerns voiced by the opposing therapy groups and the Department of Professional Regulation, the task force regrouped and proposed a Registry Act in 2010, similar to the Registry program that exists in Nevada. The Registry Act was submitted to the Senate. The bill was stopped at that time and did not go forward.

Since the summer of 2010, the task force decided to take a year to refocus and re-energize. Continued efforts were made to contact opposing groups and find resolutions to their concerns. During the 2011 legislative session, Illinois was strengthened by music therapy licensure being signed into law in North Dakota for resolution. Despite efforts from the national and state level, the opposing opposition did not waver, stating, “The state is not regulating any new professions. In fact the state is trying to deregulate some professions.” The department also informed the task force that the license would be too costly—roughly $800, despite presenting the department with ideas of how to defray cost. Senator Kotowski, the Senate Democratic staff, and Representative Mcsauliffe continued to heavily support our mission despite extreme opposition. Many other legislators also signed on as co-sponsors as a result of intense advocacy work of our task force and some IAMT members.

Senator Kotowski could have easily told us to ‘throw in the towel’ but instead, he fought for some type of legislation to be passed. SB1595 was amended in order for the bill to pass. SB1595, signed by Governor Rauner on August 18, 2015 became Public Act 99-0397: Music Therapy Advisory Board Act. This Act created an advisory board of music therapists and related professions to explore the feasibility of regulating music therapy practice in Illinois and submitting a report of its findings and recommendations to the state. Senator Kotowski was awarded the 2015 Illinois Association for Music Therapy Advocacy Award on September 26, 2015.

In 2013, the task force’s mission was to strengthen the involvement, connection and awareness of Illinois music therapists. Several events took place to aid in this mission. Social events were held in various parts of the state as a way to network, but to also inform the profession and students from the universities about the latest advocacy efforts both nationally and locally and how they can be advocates. The task force also held a Virtual Advocacy event at the 2013 AMTA conference where people were able to ask questions, voice concerns, and share ideas on advocacy efforts.

2014 began with sending out a survey to Illinois music therapists in efforts to obtain information for an updated fact sheet. Information from the survey was compiled and then shared with students from Illinois State University, under the supervision of professor Andrea Grimmmins, published the 2014 Fact Sheet brochure. The task force charged all Illinois music therapists to set up face-to-face meetings with their legislators and inform them of the national collaboration between CRMT and AMTA.

On October 31, 2014, Nancy Swanson met with Senator Dan Kotowski to educate him about music therapy and the need for state recognition. By the end of the meeting Senator Kotowski stated, “So do you want me to write up a bill”? The response was an emphatic, “Yes please!” Nancy Swanson also met with Representative Michael McAuliffe who also agreed to sponsor a bill for licensure.

At the beginning of 2015, SB1395 and HB6356 for licensure were created and subsequently met with strong opposition from the IL Department of Financial and Professional Regulations (IDFPB). Many phone conversations took place, educating the IDFPB about the importance of regulation for our profession. However, their opposition did not waver, stating, “The state is not regulating any new professions. In fact the state is trying to deregulate some professions.” The department also informed the task force that the license would be too costly—roughly $800, despite presenting the department with ideas of how to defray cost. Senator Kotowski, the Senate Democratic staff, and Representative McAuliffe continued to heavily support our mission despite extreme opposition. Many other legislators also signed on as co-sponsors as a result of intense advocacy work of our task force and some IAMT members. Senator Kotowski could have easily told us to ‘throw in the towel’ but instead, he fought for some type of legislation to be passed. SB1395 was amended in order for the bill to pass. SB1395, signed by Governor Rauner on August 18, 2015 became Public Act 99-0397. Music Therapy Advisory Board Act. This Act created an advisory board of music therapists and related professions to explore the feasibility of regulating music therapy practice in Illinois and submitting a report of its findings and recommendations to the state. Senator Kotowski was awarded the 2015 Illinois Association for Music Therapy Advocacy Award on September 26, 2015.

LESSONS LEARNED

• Legislators are just people, people looking to help their constituents. Each face-to-face meeting ended with the legislator saying, “Of course! That’s what we’re here for!”

• If you want something done, educate and then “make the ask.”

• When testifying be clear and concise.

• Emphasize the importance of legislation for our clients ahead of us as professionals.

• Legislation can take years of effort. Illinois worked for nine years before any legislation was passed.

• Building relationships and communication is essential to change.

• Find at least one government staffer who readily answers questions and is dedicated to your desired outcome.

• Jokingly: You cannot set your watch by the happenings in Springfield.
Florida

The Florida Task Force has been working hard to increase awareness of and access to music therapy services in the state since it began in 2009. Florida music therapists have been contacting legislators, holding meetings in person, and hosting successful Hill Days each of the last three legislative sessions. During the 2015 legislative session, however, the task force filed a licensure bill and led a statewide effort to increase our online presence and advocacy on social media.

During music therapy advocacy month, the task force designated the last week of January as Florida Music Therapy Week and asked music therapists and supporters to share digital content using the hashtag #FLMusicTherapyWeek. The response was phenomenal, with many quotes, infographics, pictures, and videos shared about music therapy. This online presence allowed music therapists to reconnect with the legislators they met in person during Hill Day. Music therapists sent tweets to senators and legislators, thanking them for their time and support of the bill.

Last year, the bill was heard by the Florida Senate Health Policy committee, where it passed with a bipartisan unanimous vote. Although the bill died in the next committee, the momentum gained by last year’s efforts is already paying off. Florida’s licensure bill has been filed for the 2016 legislative session and, within the first week of filing, two press articles were published! The task force has begun meeting with state legislators in advance of 2016. We have found a strong digital presence is crucial for music therapy advocacy, as most legislators now use social media with state legislators in advance of 2016. We have found a strong digital presence is crucial for music therapy advocacy, as most legislators now use social media accounts to connect with their constituents.

Happy advocating in 2016, from Florida music therapists! We’ll see you online.

Submitted by the Florida Task Force
Sharon Graham & Michelle Pellito, Co-Chairs

Oklahoma

A presentation put on by Zetta Music Therapy and Music Moves Mountains Foundation discussing music therapy with individuals with special needs. The second half of the presentation was an interactive demonstration of various ways to adapt instruments and technology for kids with special needs.

New York

The New York State Task Force on Occupational Regulation is scheduling day-long workshops at each of the five NY schools (Molloy College, Nazareth College, New York University, State University of New York (SUNY) at Fredonia, and SUNY at New Paltz) that offer licensure-qualifying programs in creative arts therapy with music therapy concentration. SUNY New Paltz hosted the first of our series. Program Director Dr. John Mahoney, LCAT, MT-BC and Assistant Professor Dr. Michael Viegas, LCAT, MT-BC worked closely with NYSTF Chair Donna Polen, LCAT, MT-BC in coordinating the workshop and securing pre-approval for CMTEs through CBMT. Along with Donna, task force members Ari Amir, MA, MT-BC, Beth McLaughlin, MSE, LCAT, MT-BC, Tracy Wnamaker, MS Ed, MT-BC, student member Rachel Reed, and MAB Government Relations Chair and AMTA Government Relations Associate Maria Fuy, MSW/LSW, LCAT, MT-BC spent the morning speaking with close to 25 students about key definitions in law and then provided a detailed, step-by-step outline of the licensure application process for the NYS Licensed Creative Arts Therapist (LCAT) before engaging the students in a discussion regarding the pursuit of an authentic MT license in NYS.

The afternoon found several students returning and joining close to 50 professionals for a four hour pre-approved CMTE. The first half concentrated on the NYS Practice Guidelines and provided two hours toward the ethics requirement for recertification; the second half of the afternoon was devoted to discussing current issues for MT practice in NY and again included a lively conversation regarding the creation of an authentic MT license in NYS. Close to 100 current members. Excitement for the future of music therapy as a licensed profession in NY was the exciting theme of the day!

Donna Polen
LCAT, MT-BC
NYSTF Chair

Leia to Right:
Dr. John Mahoney, Ari Amir, Beth McLaughlin, Backlund,
Donna Polen, Tracy Wnamaker, Maria Fuy,
Dr. Michael Viegas

Left to Right:
Dr. John Mahoney, Ari Amir, Beth McLaughlin, Backlund,
Donna Polen, Tracy Wnamaker, Maria Fuy,
Dr. Michael Viegas
Our story in Tennessee demonstrates that if we make a clear introduction and stay on point, it can increase our chance to get an audience with legislators. I personally had only thought of attending this reception to be an active observer and possibly pick up some pointers to me becoming a bit more advocacy savvy. Little did I realize that I would be the music therapist having a one to one conversation with one of our state representatives on the next day.

It happened when my neighbor suggested that I attend the Advocacy Training workshop and a legislative reception on a January “Hill Day” in downtown Nashville. I met two new colleagues at the hotel, Marybeth Brand and Dana Hunter, and the three of us studied my state representative’s photo—we were going to target meeting him.

Once sighted, we ‘moved in’ for our first-ever advocacy conversation with State Representative Gary Odom. In essence, we expressed our interest in starting ‘a conversation’ about the importance and relevance of music therapy and its gaining licensure in Tennessee. Long story short, he called over his aid and said “Let’s schedule these ladies for an office visit tomorrow.” Due to our schedules, I was the only one who could attend this meeting.

In it, I demonstrated some music therapy techniques with him and his aid and talked of the benefits of music therapy. To my surprise, he immediately wanted to call the AMTA national office and have a meeting. His time running short, he hurriedly and repeatedly kept asking “I want to talk to the head person. Let’s get ‘em on the phone right now!”

Though not on speed dial, I did, of course, have the AMTA phone number! We expressed our interest in starting ‘a conversation’ about the importance and relevance of music therapy and its gaining licensure in Tennessee. Long story short, he called over his aid and said “Let’s schedule these ladies for an office visit tomorrow.” Due to our schedules, I was the only one who could attend this meeting.

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There's no need to hold back any longer. We're all in this together. Let's move forward together and make a change for the better. Together, we can accomplish great things.
Pennsylvania

Melanie Walborn, Maria Fay, and Nicole Hahna were at the Capitol while making visits to licensure committee members of the Pennsylvania legislation. This summer, while two bills were introduced to create a state licensing board for music therapy in PA, PA task force members have learned to listen to the bill sponsors for advice on how to advocate to legislators. They suggest educate, tug at the heart strings, let them hear and see first hand accounts of the power of music therapy and why it’s so important to become a regulated field, as well as, target your advocacy to the members of the licensing committee members.

The trio also met with PA Department of Human Service Secretary, Ted Dallas, to discuss including music therapy as a separate and valid service option through the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), specifically for waivers such as the Aging Waiver, Consolidated Person/Family Directed Supports Waiver, and as a service option for ODP’s Adult Autism Waiver.

Melanie A. Walborn, MT-BC
Music Therapist-Board Certified
Managing Partner, WB Music Therapy, LLC
Music Fusion, Co-Chair

Texas

Over the course of the last few months I have had the privilege of hosting both my state legislator and state representative to a tour, music therapy observation and lunch at Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital. Both visits were a great success and the legislators seemed genuinely interested in learning about music therapy and in supporting our state recognition efforts.

Jennifer Townsend MMT, MT-BC
Sr. Music Therapist
Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital

Carolyn A Dobson, AP-BC, MT-BC
Music Therapist-Board Certified
Fellow, Neurologic Music Therapy

Left to Right: Richard Weir, Director of Child Life and Expressive Therapies; Lara Robert and Paul Robert parents of NICU twins that received Music Therapy Services at CMHH, Jennifer Townsend, MMT, MT-BC, Sr. Music Therapist, Jessica Jarvis, MT-BC, Music Therapist, Representative Ed Thompson.