



Government Affairs: 2023-2024 Advocacy Report

Advancing the Profession through Legislative Action & Community Engagement

Legislative Action & Scope of Practice

Practice Act Modernization & DPH Review

- **Milestone Reached:** Successfully completed the CT Department of Public Health (DPH) scope review process, fulfilling all requirements for a professional review of our proposed revisions.
 - **The "Hurdle":** Despite repeat advocacy efforts to advance the letter of recommendation from the DPH to the Public Health Committee, the DPH did not release its final report until the 2024 legislative window had closed. This administrative delay stalled our efforts to have a bill raised during the active session.
 - **Proactive Refinement:** During the review process, we collaborated with stakeholders (Nursing, PT, and the CT Hospital Association) to refine language regarding the administration of topical medications and non-pharmacological methods to ensure clarity and interprofessional alignment.
 - **Continuous Monitoring:** Tracked over 50 bills during the session, providing testimony on Raised Bill No. 5198 (Telehealth) and advocating for OT inclusion in workgroups focused on Loneliness and Isolation (Section 36) and Home Care Worker Safety (Bill No. 369).
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Mental Health Advocacy & Coalitions

Establishing the Mental Health Task Force

- **QMHP Recognition:** Launched a dedicated task force to determine the pathway for OT practitioners to be recognized as Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHPs) in Connecticut. This included analyzing barriers to billing and seeking inclusion in the state's behavioral health staff roster.
- **National Influence:** Responded to a Request for Information (RFI) from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), highlighting OT's role in addressing mental health disparities, social isolation, and school-based needs.
- **Interstate Collaboration:** Formed a bridge with the AOTA Mental Health Interstate Consortium. Connecticut is represented by Michele Stillman, Joanna

Perez, and Joyce Rioux, who are providing input and gathering information on state level work around mental health.

- **Knowledge Exchange:** Hosted representatives from NCOTA and NHOTA to share state-level advocacy strategies, such as utilizing HRSA grants and capstone projects to expand OT's footprint in behavioral health.
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School Practice Initiatives

The "Guidelines" Revision Project

- **Progress:** Substantial progress was made on the *Guidelines for Occupational Therapy in Connecticut Schools*. Chapters on Administration, Laws & Regulations, and Evaluation were completed or sent for member/administrator input.
 - **State & National Alignment:** Collaborated with the CT State Department of Education (SDE) for feedback on guidelines and worked with AOTA's School Workgroup to develop a briefing paper on the full scope of practice and leadership pathways for the Representative Assembly.
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Professional Development & Future Leaders

Advocacy Capacity Building

- **Sacred Heart University (SHU) Project:** Five students collaborated with Government Affairs to create an Advocacy Toolkit. This comprehensive resource includes "elevator pitch" strategies, tip sheets for various audiences, and key OT outcome metrics.
 - **Level 1 Fieldwork:** Welcomed students from CT State Manchester, providing them with real-world experience in legislative monitoring, building capacity, and understanding the AOTA Representative Assembly process.
 - **Advocacy Chats:** Initiated quarterly "Advocacy Chats" at the Fall conference to bridge the knowledge-to-practice gap, providing a forum for members to discuss professional responsibility and legislative trends.
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National Representation: AOTA Representative Assembly (RA)

- **National Policy Wins:** Connecticut practitioners were instrumental in the RA's adoption of motions regarding:
 - **Reproductive & Pelvic Health:** Societal and position statements were adopted.
 - **BIPOC Impact:** A professional policy was moved forward to affirm the occupational impact of being BIPOC.

- **School Practice:** Adoption of an action plan to investigate parity and formal leadership pathways.

Summary of 2023-2024 Outcomes

Focus Area	Key Achievement
Legislation	Completed DPH Scope Review; testified on Telehealth and Home Safety bills.
Mental Health	Launched QMHP Task Force; RFI response to NIMH; AOTA Interstate membership.
Schools	Completed 5/9 chapters of the updated State School Guidelines.
Education	Integrated SHU and CT State Manchester students into active advocacy projects.
Community	Established Quarterly Advocacy Chats and hosted AOTA Hill Day participants.

Next Steps for 2024-2025

Preparing for the 2025 legislative session by engaging in "Grip and Grin" events, small group meetings with lawmakers, and a continued focus on modernizing the Practice Act.

Advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint. We've laid the groundwork, completed the reviews, and now we stand ready to turn today's momentum into tomorrow's law.