

Michigan Passes SB 351 – Registered Acupuncturists

Governor Jennifer Granholm signed Michigan's first ever Acupuncture Law on February 23, 2006, recognizing practitioners of Acupuncture as Registered Acupuncturists. This achievement is the result of a 20 year legislative process that now ensures public access and personal choice to a proven modality of medicine while protecting public health and safety. SB 351 was sponsored by Senator Beverly Hammerstrom (R) and Representative Kevin Green (R) and passed unanimously in the State Senate and received 92% approval in the House of Representatives. Deborah Lincoln, President of the Michigan Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, was instrumental in the passage of this bill. This new law, PA 30, is a shared success for Acupuncture providers and the people of Michigan as it represents the State's desire for new healthcare options.

Interviewee: Deborah Lincoln, RN, DiplAc, NCCAOM; President, Michigan Association of Oriental Medicine (DL); American Association of Oriental Medicine, V.P. Corporate Events, Board Director

Interviewer: Rebekah Christensen, Executive Director, American Association of Oriental Medicine (RC)



Deborah Lincoln, RN, DiplAc, NCCAOM

session. In October 2004, we hired a tremendous lobbying firm that pushed our bill forward; fortunately, the bill was re-introduced by Sen. Hammerstrom (R) and co-sponsored by Rep. Green (R) of Wyoming, MI.

With this combination of a great support in the House and Senate, SB 351 was guided masterfully by our lobbyist into a unanimous Senate vote, then went on win by a 92% vote in the House. MAAOM members, headed by President Deborah Lincoln, visited the Michigan state capitol –to provide several days of education. Not only did we treat their individual patients, but numerous state legislators and government officials. We had prime media coverage, which really broadened public perception of the field. Many of us attended fund raisers in support of this legislation.

RC: Which supporters played a significant role in moving this bill forward?

DL: Senator Beverly Hammerstrom (R), Chair of the Health Care Committee, Majority Floor Leader, along with 18 co-sponsors in the Senate, and Rep. Green (R) and many of his co-sponsors. We also had the support of the Board of Chiropractic, The Board of Osteopathy and the Nursing Board. The only opposition was the Michigan Medical Board.

RC: What is the next step for acupuncturists in Michigan to take in order to continue to grow this field?

DL: The next step for Michigan acupuncturists is to first get a State Board of Acupuncture set up, which is due to be announced by June 1. Interviews are all completed. Also, we need to organize lectures in order to educate both the public and private medical providers about the significant knowledge and expertise backing the practice

RC: How do you account for the fact that a bill which took 20 years to pass did so with such significant legislative support? Do you see this as characteristic of the increased acceptance of alternative modes of health care?

DL: What led to the final approval of this bill was a symbiosis of political, professional and public support.

We were determined and tireless in our efforts to garner political support through lobbying.

Developments in our associations' structure and collaboration provided substantive groundwork upon which politicians were able to base their decisions. Legislative staff was able to work with our state, and national and international contacts, to have their questions and concerns addressed.

MAAOM members rose to the challenge of advocating for our industry through an effort we called "Acupuncture Educational Days." Practitioners gave complimentary treatments to Legislators and other government officials, all of whom reported that they loved it and returned to their offices relaxed and feeling the Qi flowing. News of this demonstration spread rapidly, and statewide television and radio broadcasts plus newspaper articles really gave a push to our industry, and enlivened the practice in our

state.

Finally, I would say that biggest help with pushing this bill through the Legislature was never giving up.

RC: Can you talk a little bit about the evolution of SB 351?

DL: Michigan had no law for acupuncturists until now, as over the last 20 years since introducing the bill, the state legislators and Governors were not willing to expand government regulation of any new health care practitioners. The present Governor saw the need for this valuable addition to Michigan's growing need for readily available choices of treatments that work, and the savings to the people in our state for health care costs.

The first bill was introduced 17 years ago following a three-year battle to get this done after an acupuncturist was arrested for practicing medicine without a license. This incident forged our need to move ahead for state regulation.

After many attempts to get this bill through, we were opposed by the Michigan Medical Society, chiropractors and former Governors until 2003. We got a lucky break and had our bill introduced by Rep. Richardville (R) and many co-sponsors as a bipartisan bill. Unfortunately, we did not make it through the

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