

IN SUPPORT OF SB-22 ANIMAL MASSAGE

AGRICULTURE & INDUSTRY
EXHIBIT NO. 27
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BILL NO. SB22

I am the owner of the Montana School of Equine Massage located in Hamilton, MT. I have been a Certified Human Massage Practitioner for the past 13 years and have studied various massage techniques in Montana, Oregon, California, Virginia, China, Hawaii and Florida. I am currently in my 7th season of teaching equine massage to students from all over the US as well as Montana, Canada and Europe - and will return to Ireland again in July 2005 to teach my second class there as well as Scotland and Denmark.

I offer two levels of accreditation from my school as well as a home study program totaling 140 clock hours of credits. My school meets licensure requirements set forth by Washington State and I have accredited 80 Washington State students which to date have all received their licenses. Within the State of Montana I have accredited over 150 students. My total enrollment at the end of 2004 from all geographical areas was 1,500 students - 143 of which were Native Americans from the Dakotas, Montana, Canada and Colorado.

I teach these techniques from my own perspective and try to instill into my students the ability to 'see' through touch in my teachings. I am legally blind with only 5 degrees total vision - with a degenerative retinal disease which will eventually render me completely blind. Therefore, my school tends to be more than learning how to massage horses - because of who I am and my teaching philosophies, it tends to be a life changing experience for the students who choose to attend.

Because of my own low vision, I often receive students referred by their state's visual services programs and/or vocational rehabilitation programs. I have received referrals from both these programs from 5 different states, all of which have approved my curriculum and registered me as a recognized vendor with their services.

Montana State, through it's Visual Services Assistance Program has invested close to \$30,000 into me personally for training, tuition, travel expenses and business setup and equipment to keep me productively working irregardless of whether or not I lose all of my vision. Fortunately, I came to this program with an extensive background in business management and because of my success and the humanitarian nature of my work with student and horse I am utilized by Montana Visual Services as a mentor and model success example.

The application of massage to a horse's full body takes approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours start to finish - IF the animal is well mannered. Due to the extreme physical nature of this work I recommend to my students to limit their daily clientele to no more that 3 animals/day. It is my professional opinion that to limit this work to licensed veterinarians would be a travesty to their education and profession. A veterinarian's time and expertise should be better spent applying veterinary medicine - not animal massage. Animal massage is NOT a substitute for veterinary care - rather it is a complimentary service, often times used to keep an animal calm and quiet until a veterinarian arrives on site for professional medical attention.

Due to the non-invasiveness of most massage applications it is extremely difficult to perform soft tissue manipulation in a harmful way with proper training. In my 13 years as a human massage practitioner and 7 years of teaching equine massage with over 1,500 graduate students, I have had no incidents of harmed animals in any manner. I instruct all my students to assess each situation and verify whether or not a veterinarian has examined the potential animal before making a site visit. If during their massage application a student observes an extreme reactive or obvious injured condition with the animal they are instructed to abort the procedure and advise the owner to consult with their veterinarian before further treatment.

Thank you - for these reasons and more, I am in support of SB-22 Animal Massage.

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