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To whom it may concern:

I am writing to you as the Chief Executive Officer of the American Group Psychotherapy Association. We are the primary professional organization for group therapists, serving as the voice of group therapy for mental health clinicians and the public at large, both nationally and internationally. Our organization comprises almost 2,000 members from the full range of mental health disciplines, including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, and creative arts therapists.

While we have a large geographic reach, our offices are in New York City, and we are often engaged with practice, outreach, and training throughout New York state. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, we were granted substantial funding from the New York Times Company Foundation through which we coordinated extensive group services for those impacted by this mass trauma event. We are submitting this testimony on behalf of our organization due to urgent concern that the proposed Health and Mental Hygiene Bill Part Q will have an immediate and negative impact on consumers of mental health care in New York, as well as our membership.

Creative arts therapists are valued members of our professional community, and we strongly support their inclusion in the historic mental health budget that is being enacted. Creative arts therapists have made significant contributions to AGPA's work. We view their clinical training as equivalent to that of other Masters-level therapists and it is a discipline that is included in our Certified Group Psychotherapist credential initial requirements. We also value the unique set of skills creative arts therapists have, which make them uniquely positioned to treat vulnerable populations for whom more traditional approaches have been ineffective.

In fact, we appointed Craig Haen, a Licensed Creative Arts Therapist, as the Co-Chair of our Community Outreach Task Force, a role he has held for the past 9 years. Community Outreach engages in some of the most important work of our organization, as they provide training, consultation, and direct response in the wake of mass trauma events, both nationally and internationally. During Dr. Haen's tenure, we have coordinated local responses to hate crimes, the immigration crisis, sudden deaths in organizations, first responder fatalities, and military deployment. We have continued to provide support for first responders and those impacted by 9/11 and have offered extensive support to teachers, medical professionals, home health aides, and families in New York state in the wake of COVID-19.

Through this work, we have seen very clearly how valuable the arts can be in addressing and supporting the recovery of those exposed to trauma, and the significant contributions LCATs can make to addressing the mental health crisis that is impacting consumers, not just in New York, but across the country. We strongly urge you to include LCATs in the proposed Health and Mental Hygiene Bill Part Q to ensure access to their valuable clinical services.

Sincerely,

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