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SEN. SMITH AND REP. ESKAMANI FILE LEGISLATION TO ESTABLISH LICENSURE FOR PROFESSIONAL MUSIC THERAPISTS, PROTECTING ACCESS FOR FLORIDIANS WHO NEED IT

Orlando, FL — 12/22/25: Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith (D - Orlando) and Representative Dr. Anna V. Eskamani (D-Orlando) filed legislation to create a professional licensure system for music therapists in Florida, a step advocates say is urgently needed after recent changes to Medicaid funding administration have led to [the loss of critical music therapy services](#) for people with disabilities.

Recent Medicaid funding changes have disrupted access to expressive therapies like music therapy, leaving families and providers across the state confused and financially strained. Sunshine Health — which manages the state’s Medicaid funds for expressive therapy — terminated its contract with a third-party administrator effective December 31, 2025, after finding that some providers were not meeting state requirements. Because Florida does not currently license music therapists, many board-certified practitioners were deemed ineligible for reimbursement or required to obtain a Medicaid ID before they can be paid, leading some providers to cancel services and lay off staff. Families worry that medically prescribed therapy sessions could end entirely for their loved ones.

“Music therapy is not optional for children who depend on it, it’s a lifeline,” said Sen. Carlos Guillermo Smith. *“This legislation strengthens patient access and aligns Florida with at least 20 states who already license music therapy. It would also prevent the type of care disruption experienced this past summer which left thousands of disabled and autistic Florida children without access to successful treatment.”*

The legislation would establish a licensure framework under the Florida Department of Health, define educational and certification standards, and create a Music Therapy Advisory Committee to support implementation. It also provides clear scope-of-practice protections to ensure coordination with other licensed professionals where necessary, while preventing unqualified individuals from misrepresenting themselves. Licensure would be effective beginning January 1, 2027, with a transition period for recent graduates.

“Every Floridian deserves quality, consistent health care, and right now people with disabilities, PTSD, and so many others are losing something that literally gives them a voice,” said Rep. Dr. Anna V. Eskamani. *“Our bill will ensure that qualified, board-certified music therapists are licensed and accountable, so families can continue to access the therapies their doctors prescribe without interruption.”*

Local providers are in full support of this bill, with Tamela Ponder of Joyful Music Therapy sharing, *“When Medicaid reimbursement was suddenly cut off, we were forced to make heartbreaking decisions — reducing services, laying off staff, and leaving families stranded and unsure if their loved ones would be able to continue receiving medically prescribed expressive therapy. Music therapy helps people with disabilities communicate, regulate emotions, and make meaningful progress when other therapies fall short. This legislation establishing licensure is a critical step to protecting future access to care, preventing billing-related disruptions, and ensuring qualified, board-certified music therapists continue serving the people who rely on us most.”*

The move toward licensure is supported by families, providers, and advocates who say it will prevent future coverage gaps, increase oversight, and ensure that Medicaid and other payers can more reliably reimburse qualified professionals.

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