

ILOTA Springfield Lobby Day: How Did it Impact You?

As the Fall season approaches leaving the ILOTA board and committee members busy planning for this year's conference, the past spring season sprung the ILOTA Advocacy and Political Action Committee into action. On April 6th, 2011, representatives of the ILOTA board, ILOTA members, our state association's lobbyist, and students gathered to introduce the new Illinois 97th General Assembly to the occupational therapy profession. ILOTA's lobby day was intended to educate many of the new legislators and to offer thanks to those incumbent legislators who have supported the profession and our clients. Thanks to the coordinated efforts of Kim Langley, ILOTA's Director of Advocacy, and the hard work from the students and staff at Southern Illinois Collegiate Common Market, ILOTA was well represented and welcomed at the State Capitol.

Maureen Mulhall, ILOTA's lobbyist, assisted us in beginning our venture with a run down of the Senate and House session schedules for that day. Groups were dispersed to all the legislative member's offices to drop off mementos and information regarding occupational therapy prior to the start of the day's sessions. Occupational therapy practitioners and students were able to make personal visits to their respective district legislatures regarding the importance of occupational therapy and the impact of our services.

We were also able to observe the legislators on the House floor and noted a few legislative bills that were relevant to the occupational profession and would impact our future service delivery. Specifically, we witnessed House Bill 1530 pass its third reading sponsored by Representative Lou Lang from the 16th District. This bill will impact practitioners who treat populations such as those with autism, habilitative conditions, mental and/or substance abuse conditions. HB 1530 states that the "...medical coverage benefits provided through a group or individual policy of accident and health insurance or managed care plan shall be subject to the parity requirements of the provision concerning mental health parity". HB 1530 is currently awaiting a signature from the Governor once the Fall sessions begins.

In the Senate, Senate Bill 1557 was due for its second reading that day. This bill provides "...coverage under the Act for medically necessary physical therapy and occupational therapy when that therapy is ordered for the treatment of autoimmune diseases or referred for the same purpose (rather than at any time medically necessary physical therapy and occupational therapy is ordered or referred)". Although it was scheduled for discussion that day, the bill did not come to the floor until two days later, passed and is also currently awaiting review and the Governor's signature. Just think, who would have known or been aware that in just the one afternoon we were at our State's capitol, legislative action was directly impacting our professional services and our clients?

So, if you are still wondering how does this impact me, here are some question(s) and actions to consider:

- Is Representative Lang your House Representative? Or, are any of the legislators who sponsored or supported the passing of HB1530 your district legislators? If so, thank them for supporting HB1530 since it expands the coverage under medical insurance plans for mental health and behavioral services we as OT's provide to our clients.
- Do you serve clients with auto-immune disorders such as HIV AIDS? If so, thank your local representative for recognizing the importance of occupational therapy services as medically necessary for the overall health and well being of individuals with these chronic conditions. Or, are there other populations vulnerable to having limited access to our services whose voices need to be heard by your local legislator?
- Are there other bills currently being introduced that will affect you? How would you find out? First and foremost, your State association, ILOTA, has tried to make this as convenient for you as possible by listing monthly all the relevant State bills on the website under "Government Affairs. This list is compiled by our lobbyist and provides brief descriptions of the State bills. For instance, HB2856 will require that the Department of Human Services "...to develop and maintain an updated list of all of the State-approved public or private early intervention

service providers in each local service area. Provides that the list shall be available on the Department or designated entity's website to allow free access to the list by eligible children and their families". Are you an EI provider that should be on that list? Do you feel a list should be made available?

Now, this brings us to this question, if you have been convinced that you, as an occupational therapy practitioner, are indeed impacted daily by the legislative laws that are passed in Illinois, what would you like to do to get involved? Here are some suggestions:

- Become informed and involved by visiting the ILOTA website (www.ilota.org) to find information regarding current legislation under the "Government Affairs" tab
- Contact the ILOTA Executive Board Director of Advocacy, Kim Langley, to find out how you can participate in advocating for the profession or to alert the Board regarding issues/legislation that impact the profession. Kim can be reached via email at: ilotapublicpolicy@yahoo.com, or call (618)926-0292.
- Introduce yourself to your local legislator as a constituent and as an occupational therapy practitioner
- Contact Monika Robinson, IOTPAAC Committee Chair to find out about volunteer opportunities to attend political fundraisers, identify legislators who support the profession, and/or donate to the IOTPAAC Fund. Monika can be reached via email at: mrobinsonot@gmail.com. More information on IOTPAAC can be found in this issue of the Communiqué.
- Help plan and get involved in the next Lobby Day! Contact ILOTA for more information at: office@ilota.org