

Massage Credentials in the State of California

If you earn a certificate or degree through the Massage Therapy Program, you are not “certified” nor do you possess a “certification.” Any certificate or diploma from a massage school in California is simply a piece of paper stating that a student completed a course of study. Although many massage schools in California and massage professionals who receive their training in these schools have been using terms such as “certified massage practitioner,” “CMP,” “certified massage therapist,” and “CMT” when describing their training programs and the credentials earned in such programs, a new state law makes it illegal for massage professionals to use these and other terms—“licensed” or “registered,” for example—unless they satisfy the requirements set forth in the law.¹

Senate Bill 731, enacted in September 2008, created a private non-profit [California Massage Therapy Council](http://www.cmtc.org) empowered by the State to issue certification to massage professionals using a two-tier system: a Massage Practitioner level for those with 250 hours of training (to be phased out in 2015) and a Massage Therapist level for those with 500 hours of training. The certification will be “voluntary,” meaning that you can still practice massage without the state certification if you meet local business licensing requirements. Fortunately, SB 731 will preempt the patchwork of demeaning and discriminatory municipal codes that currently regulate many massage professionals in California. To read the new law: http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb_0701-0750/sb_731_bill_20080927_chaptered.html.

Many massage professionals who received their training in California used the terms “certified” and “certification” for decades even though the terms are technically incorrect. The terms sound professional, they make the business of massage seem more legitimate, and it always looks good to have some letters or a title after your name. However, the use of these terms will be protected under SB 731, so we can use the terms “certified” or “certification” only when referring to someone certified through the California Massage Therapy Council. When referring to someone not certified by the Council, we can use terms such as “massage practitioner” or “massage therapist.”

Prior to passage of SB 731, the only credential granted to massage professionals by the State of California was the “Certificate of Authorization for Service,” or CERT, issued by the Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (BPPVE). The CERT authorizes “an individual to be an instructor or administrator in any private vocational postsecondary educational institution in California.” This credential did not authorize a massage professional to practice massage. The right to practice massage is granted by city and county governments that issue permits and business licenses to massage professionals who satisfy the requirements of the particular municipality in which they want to practice.²

Previously, the BPPVE provided the only state regulation of our profession: issuing CERTs and granting approval to private massage schools to offer instruction in massage therapy. The Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education Reform Act states that any “certificate” issued by a California massage school is recognized by the state as merely a diploma. The state's definition of “Diploma” is “any diploma, certificate, transcript, document, or other writing in any language other than a degree which signifies, purports, or is generally taken to signify satisfactory completion of the requirements of an academic, educational, technological, or professional program of study beyond the secondary school level.”

Another term massage professionals in California used mistakenly for decades is “state certification,” and many referred to themselves as “state certified.” The myth of “state certification” may have started when graduates of private massage schools noted that the State of California “certified” or “licensed” the massage schools they attended (this information may appear on a school’s diplomas). Since they earned diplomas from schools certified by the State, graduates may have jumped to the mistaken conclusion that they were therefore “state certified” or possessed “state certification.” Some California massage schools claimed that they offered a “State Certification Program,” a phrase that perpetuated the myth.

MPC is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an institutional accrediting body recognized by the Commission of Recognition of Post-secondary Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education. MPC is also approved by the California State Department of Education. MPC’s certificates and degrees are therefore acceptable in any California city or county that requires a diploma from an approved school as part of the application for a massage permit or business license.

For more information about the MPC Massage Therapy Program, please use the information at the top of the first page.

For more information about Monterey Peninsula College: <http://www.mpc.edu/Pages/default.aspx>

Please note the following MPC telephone numbers: Admissions office: 831-646-4002 Financial Aid: 831-646-4030.

Official transcripts are available at Admissions and Records.

We hope that you will join us at MPC, where we are committed to offering quality massage therapy training in a safe, ethical and professional atmosphere.

¹ Generally, in the nomenclature of massage professionals, “practitioners” have less than, and “therapists” more than 500 hours of training.

² The amount of training required for a massage permit or business license in California varies widely, from 100 to 500 hours or more. Many employers now require that their employees have 500 hours of training as well as be Nationally Certified in Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork.