

## Certification of Massage Professionals in the State of California

*If you earn a certificate or degree through the Massage Therapy Program, you are not “certified” nor have you earned a “certification.” Moreover, it is now illegal in California to use terms such as “CMP,” “CMT,” “Certified Massage Practitioner,” or “Certified Massage Therapist” unless you are certified through the California Massage Therapy Council, created after enactment in September 2008 of California Senate Bill 731 (SB 731), California’s new massage law, which is discussed below.*

Before enactment of SB 731, there was never any State-approved certification, registration or licensure of massage professionals in California, nor was there any State regulation of the practice of massage. The only credential granted to massage professionals was the “Certificate of Authorization for Service,” or CERT, issued by the former Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (BPPVE) in the State of California Department of Consumer Affairs. A CERT authorized “an individual to be an instructor or administrator in any private vocational postsecondary educational institution in California.” The CERT did not authorize a massage professional to *practice* massage, only to be a teacher or administrator in a private massage school. Because the State didn’t regulate the practice of massage, city and county governments created municipal codes authorizing the issue of business licenses and permits to massage professionals who satisfied the requirements of each municipality in which they wanted to practice.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to SB 731, the BPPVE (and its predecessor, the Council for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education) provided the only state regulation of the massage therapy profession: issuing CERTs and granting approval to (and regulating) private schools offering instruction in massage therapy. The BPPVE administered the Private Postsecondary and Vocational Reform Act (PPVRA) of 1989, which stated that any certificate issued by a private California massage school was recognized by the state as merely a diploma.

Since there has never been any California agency empowered to certify massage professionals, why have massage professionals trained in California, and the schools providing this training, used the terms “certified,” “certification,” “state certified,” “state certification,” “Certified Massage Practitioner,” “CMP,” “Certified Massage Therapist,” or “CMT”? The myth of massage certification in California is at least several decades old. Perhaps the myth began when graduates of private massage schools noted that the State of California “certified” or “licensed” the schools they attended (this information sometimes appeared on a school’s diplomas). Since these graduates earned diplomas from schools certified by the State, some probably jumped to the mistaken conclusion that they were therefore “certified,” “state certified,” or possessed “certification” or “state certification.” The myth may have originated if a municipality in California issued a certification allowing the practice of massage within its jurisdiction. Maybe the myth started when graduates of massage schools in states that *do* certify massage professionals entered California and used the titles granted to them in other states. Some California massage schools continue to use questionable phrases to make their programs more attractive to prospective students. For example, one school claims to offer a “Certified Massage Therapist Program,” a phrase that, at best, is confusing and misleading, since only the California Massage Therapy Council can certify graduates of massage schools in California.

Use of the aforementioned terms sounds professional, the terms make the business of massage appear legitimate, and it always looks good to have some letters or a title after your name. However, the terms never had any legal standing in California, and many people both inside and outside of the massage profession still don’t realize or admit this.

Under SB 731, massage professionals are regulated by the private non-profit California Massage Therapy Council (CAMTC), 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 (no new Practitioner certifications will be issued after 2015) and a Massage Therapist level for those with 500 hours of training. The Massage Practitioner certification requires that applicants complete their training “at a single approved school” (MPC is an approved school). This is important to remember when considering changing schools before completing a program.

SB 731 intended certification to be “voluntary,” meaning that massage professionals could still practice massage without the state-approved certification if they met existing local business licensing requirements. However, since some cities and counties will *require* that massage professionals who apply for a business license possess CAMTC certification, it will be mandatory in some places. Fortunately, for those who earn certification from CAMTC, they no longer are subject to many of the demeaning and discriminatory provisions of municipal codes that regulated many massage professionals prior to passage of SB 731. Read the new law here: [http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb\\_0701-0750/sb\\_731\\_bill\\_20080927\\_chaptered.html](http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb_0701-0750/sb_731_bill_20080927_chaptered.html).

SB 731 requires that massage professionals who use any of the terms denoting certification, or others, such as “licensed” or “registered,” must be certified by CAMTC. Using the terms without CAMTC certification is an “unfair business practice,” “unfair competition,” and a violation of section 17206 (a) of the California Business and Professions Code, which authorizes “a civil penalty not to exceed two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500) for each violation.”

When referring to a massage professional not certified by CAMTC, we can use terms such as “massage practitioner” or “massage therapist.” To check whether a massage professional is certified by CAMTC, you can look the person up on the CAMTC web site: [www.camtc.org](http://www.camtc.org).

<sup>1</sup> The amount of training required for a massage permit or business license in California varied widely, typically ranging from 100 to 500 hours or more. Many employers require that employees have 500 hours of training. With passage of SB 731, many employers may require that massage professionals be certified by CAMTC, even if local municipal ordinances do not require it.