

Equine Massage Bill LB596 Returns to Legislative Agenda

A bill to end state job licensing for professional horse massage practitioners, and to replace the requirement with a state registry and private certification, is returning to the agenda in the Nebraska Legislature after some senators sought clarifying language in amendments to the bill in its first-round debate.

Sen. Mike Groene's Legislative Bill [596](#) and Amendment [2315](#) are currently seventh on [Wednesday's agenda](#) in the Unicameral, only one bill after LB299, a bill to review job state licensing laws comprehensively. The Nebraska Legislature begins session at 9 a.m. Central Time today.

LB596 was advanced by the Health and Human Services Committee in 2017. It has since received Speaker Priority status for the 2018 session.

Currently, equine massage practitioners in Nebraska must either work under the supervision of a veterinarian, or become licensed as an animal therapist. In order to qualify for an animal therapist license, a practitioner must also be licensed to practice on people in the services they want to offer. That means someone performing equine massage first has to be a licensed massage therapist, requiring two government licenses for this occupation.

Nebraska has one of the country's most costly and time-consuming massage therapy licensing requirements, which takes 1,000 hours of training and can cost over \$15,000.

In [an interview with the Associated Press](#), Karen Hough (HUFF) of Arnold, Nebraska stated that "It flies in the face of reason that you need that much more education just to massage a horse." Hough, who has received equine massage training as LB596's amendment would require, used to run a small business offering equine massage to youth competitors for \$30 a session, until the state veterinary licensing board issued a cease and desist order that forced her to close up shop.

In December, aspiring practitioner Dawn Hatcher of Columbus [spoke to the Platte Institute](#) about Nebraska's current requirements for practicing equine massage:

"For a working mother, this was both time and cost prohibitive, and it seemed ridiculous, since human anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology is vastly different than equine," said Hatcher.

“I can’t spend that amount of time and money on a certification I’ll never use. It doesn’t make sense. We should be able to focus our efforts on the specific equine training required for our field of practice,” said Hatcher.

The original version of LB596 simply exempts equine massage from state licensing laws. Under Amendment 2315, equine massage practitioners – the legally permitted title for the profession, according to the amendment – would also have to register with the state.

The registration would have to be renewed every five years, and requires evidence of a certificate in equine massage from an accredited training program. Prior to January 2022, previously uncertified practitioners could practice with two letters of recommendation by licensed veterinarians attesting to their competency to practice.

“We are excited Sen. Groene’s bill was picked to be included on the 2018 agenda,” said Nicole Fox, Director of Government Relations at the Platte Institute.

The Platte Institute submitted [written testimony in support](#) of LB596 when it was heard in committee.

“LB596 creates an opportunity for many new rural, and often women-owned businesses, to be formed. Some people we’ve talked to have been waiting years for this red tape to be cut, and with any luck, they could be open for business before this year is over,” Fox said.