

**RULES  
OF  
THE TENNESSEE MASSAGE LICENSURE BOARD**

**CHAPTER 0870-02  
GENERAL RULES GOVERNING MASSAGE THERAPY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

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**0870-02-.01 DEFINITIONS.** As used in this chapter, the following terms and acronyms shall have the following meanings ascribed to them:

- (1) Board – Tennessee Massage Licensure Board
- (2) Program – Any massage therapy program or school
- (3) TBR – Tennessee Board of Regents
- (4) THEC – Tennessee Higher Education Commission
- (5) FSMTB – The Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards
- (6) MBLEx – The Massage and Bodyworks Licensing Examination established by the FSMTB

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 4-5-202, 4-5-204, 63-18-111, and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed March 24, 2006; effective June 7, 2006. Amendment filed April 9, 2012; effective July 8, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a stay of the rules on July 2, 2012; new effective date August 3, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a second stay of the rules on July 13, 2012; new effective date September 6, 2012. Amendments filed May 19, 2017; effective August 17, 2017.

**0870-02-.02 PROGRAM APPROVAL AND CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS.**

- (1) Massage therapy programs must receive written approval from the Tennessee Massage Licensure Board through the application process described in paragraph (2) below. Such approval is not transferable.
- (2) Application Process
  - (a) Massage therapy programs seeking approval must submit an application to the Board a minimum of thirty (30) days prior to the next regularly scheduled Board meeting in order for the Board to review the application. The application must provide the following information:
    1. Name of parent institution and authority for operations;
    2. Location of principal clinical facilities;
    3. Locations of all satellite facilities;
    4. Names and license numbers of all licensed teaching staff and the program director;

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5. Curriculum vitae, including professional license numbers and description and explanation of any prior disciplinary action taken against a license, for all teaching staff, including the program director;
  6. Maximum class size;
  7. A complete copy of the program catalog, submitted on plain copy paper, front-side only; and
  8. Submission of other such information that the Board may deem necessary.
- (b) The program director may, at the discretion of the Board, be required to appear before the Board as part of the initial approval process. The curriculum shall be presented at the meeting.
- (3) The Board-approved program shall adhere to the following minimum standards:
- (a) Instructor/student ratio shall be at least one (1) instructor to every fourteen (14) students for any hands-on class;
  - (b) The program curriculum shall include, but not be limited to, the topics contained in the MBLEx (or other current examination approved by the Board) Content Outline at the time of admission of the student. The program shall, at a minimum, consist of six hundred fifty (650) classroom hours and must contain:
    1. Two hundred (200) classroom hours of sciences including, but not limited to, anatomy, physiology-Western and/or Eastern, kinesiology, pathology, HIV/AIDS and blood-borne pathogens, and hygiene (including standard precautions). Other sciences related to the human body may be included with Board approval.
    2. Three hundred (300) classroom hours of basic massage theory and practice including, but not limited to, history, benefits, indications, contraindications, demonstration and supervised practice, client assessment/evaluation, soft tissue manipulations including: gliding, kneading, friction, compression, vibration, percussion, stretching, joint movements, draping, positioning, turning, feedback, charting/documentation, proper body mechanics, self-care, and intern clinic.
    3. One hundred twenty-five (125) classroom hours of related subjects including, but not limited to, business standards of practice, communication skills, CPR/First Aid, the Americans with Disabilities Act, referral methods, specialized populations, and specialized and adjunct therapies/modalities (including hydrotherapy).
    4. Twenty (20) classroom hours of ethics instruction.
    5. Five (5) classroom hours regarding Tennessee massage statutes and regulations.
  - (c) The program catalog, program syllabus, policies, procedures and the handbook or brochure regarding the approved examination, current content outline and eligibility criteria, are to be distributed on or before the first (1st) class session.
  - (d) The program shall ensure that each graduating class shall have received a minimum of two (2) hours classroom presentation prior to graduation by the impaired professional

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assistance program contracted by the Board. Both the program and the impaired professional assistance program shall each maintain documentation of each presentation reflecting the date, time and attendance of the presentation and shall make such documentation available upon request by the Board. Failure to comply with this provision may subject the program to withdrawal of program approval.

- (e) The program must document that each student has signed and dated an acknowledgement that they understand the requirements for licensure, specifically the provisions and the Board's policies regarding criminal convictions, prior to enrollment in the program.
- (f) The program must document that each student has signed and dated an acknowledgement that they are prohibited from receiving any form of compensation for massage, including but not limited to tips, gift cards, donations, etc., while enrolled in the program.
- (g) The program must have a written policy on the accepted pass-fail rates or grading system used by the program.
- (h) The program must have a written protocol or policy on the mechanism to evaluate a student's performance. At least one (1) evaluation is required within the first half of the program.
- (i) The program shall create and maintain records on each student, including official transcripts, in compliance with the rules of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission or the Tennessee Board of Regents.
- (j) Upon request, the program shall provide a copy of the transcript to the student upon completion of or withdrawal from the program. The student must comply with the enrollment agreement to receive a copy.
- (k) The transcript shall comply with all THEC requirements concerning what must be included on official transcripts.
- (l) The program shall notify the Board of any change in directorship and/or instructors within ten (10) days of hire or discharge. Documentation of the training and experience of any new hires must be received within ten (10) days of hire.
- (m) The program shall notify the Board within ten (10) days of any changes made in the operation of the school such as a change of ownership, director of education, institutional director, location, and/or approval status with THEC or TBR.
- (n) At any time, designees of the Department of Health or other state agencies shall be provided full access to program materials, examinations, and the classroom during instruction. Failure to provide access pursuant to this provision may subject the provider to withdrawal of program approval.
- (o) A member of the Board or a Board designee may issue preliminary program approval subject to subsequent Board ratification.
- (p) The program must have a written policy on the dismissal of students.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 63-1-136, 63-18-111, and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed March 24, 2006; effective June 7, 2006. Amendment filed April 30, 2008; effective July 14, 2008. Amendment filed April 9, 2009; effective June 23, 2009. Repeal and new rule filed April 9, 2012; effective

(Rule 0870-02-.02, continued)

*July 8, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a stay of the rules on July 2, 2012; new effective date August 3, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a second stay of the rules on July 13, 2012; new effective date September 6, 2012. Amendments filed May 19, 2017; effective August 17, 2017. Amendments filed April 21, 2025; effective July 20, 2025.*

**0870-02-.03 WITHDRAWAL OF PROGRAM APPROVAL.** Program approval may be withdrawn if the Board finds the program in violation of any of the Board's statutes or regulations or if the Board finds the program inadequate for certification purposes based upon random auditing of the program and/or its effectiveness in producing qualified graduates. The minimum standard for continued program approval based on effectiveness in producing qualified graduates shall be at least seventy percent (70%) of the students passing the licensure examination on first (1st) attempt over at least a twelve (12) month period.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 63-18-111 and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed March 24, 2006; effective June 7, 2006. Repeal and new rule filed April 9, 2012; effective July 8, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a stay of the rules on July 2, 2012; new effective date August 3, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a second stay of the rules on July 13, 2012; new effective date September 6, 2012.

**0870-02-.04 PROGRAM ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS.**

- (1) Students must be at least eighteen (18) years old;
- (2) Students must have either a high school diploma or GED certificate;
- (3) Students must be legally entitled to live and work in the United States; and
- (4) Students may not have been convicted of the offense of prostitution or sexual misconduct.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 4-5-202, 4-5-204, 63-18-111, and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed March 24, 2006; effective June 7, 2006. The Government Operations Committee filed a stay of the rules on July 2, 2012; new effective date August 3, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a second stay of the rules on July 13, 2012; new effective date September 6, 2012.

**0870-02-.05 MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR DIRECTORS, INSTRUCTORS AND CLASSROOMS.**

- (1) Directors and Instructors
  - (a) Program Director – The program director of the massage therapy program must be currently licensed in Tennessee as a massage therapist with at least five (5) years experience. The program director must meet all other conditions required by THEC or TBR to be a program director. For purposes of this chapter of rules, the program director is the individual who has direct responsibility for the supervision and daily operations of the massage therapy program or school.
  - (b) Director of Education – The director of education must meet all conditions required by THEC or TBR to be a director of education. If the director of education also functions as the massage therapy program director, he/she must be currently licensed in Tennessee as a massage therapist with at least five (5) years experience.
  - (c) Institution Director – The institution director must meet all conditions required by THEC or TBR to be an institution director. If the institution director also functions as the massage therapy program director, he/she must be currently licensed in Tennessee as a massage therapist with at least five (5) years experience.

(Rule 0870-02-.05, continued)

- (d) Instructors – Any persons who instruct must be currently Tennessee licensed professionals in their appropriate profession if such profession requires licensure. Instructors must have at least three (3) years of practical experience within the past seven (7) years in the subject area to be taught.
  - (e) Instructors who are professionally licensed/authorized by any state or certified by any national organization must disclose to the program any prior disciplinary action by such states or national organizations, and the program shall so notify the Board. The Board may deny approval of a program based upon an instructor's past disciplinary history.
  - (f) The program director shall establish an evaluation system to evaluate the performance of each instructor.
  - (g) The program director shall ensure that staff meetings are held to discuss progress of students, policies and procedures for the school, and changes to the statutes and rules of the Tennessee Massage Licensure Board which will affect the program's students.
- (2) Classrooms. Classrooms must be appropriately equipped to promote effective instruction.
- (a) The classroom size must accommodate the number of students enrolled in the program, and;
  - (b) The classroom must be appropriately equipped to promote effective instruction.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 4-5-202, 4-5-204, 63-18-111, and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed March 24, 2006; effective June 7, 2006. Amendment filed April 9, 2012; effective July 8, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a stay of the rules on July 2, 2012; new effective date August 3, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a second stay of the rules on July 13, 2012; new effective date September 6, 2012. Amendments filed May 19, 2017; effective August 17, 2017.

**0870-02-.06 PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.**

- (1) All programs shall create written policies for all of the following and shall distribute them to all students:
  - (a) Infection control;
  - (b) Emergency management;
  - (c) Fire and safety; and
  - (d) Sexual harassment and misconduct.
- (2) All programs shall have at least one (1) person qualified in Basic Life Support (BLS) available during all clinical and classroom hours.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 63-18-111 and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed March 24, 2006; effective June 7, 2006. Repeal and new rule filed April 9, 2012; effective July 8, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a stay of the rules on July 2, 2012; new effective date August 3, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a second stay of the rules on July 13, 2012; new effective date September 6, 2012.

**0870-02-.07 ANNUAL REPORT.** Every Board-approved program shall file an annual report with the Board on or before December 31 of each calendar year.

(Rule 0870-02-.07, continued)

- (1) The report shall contain:
  - (a) The number of students enrolled;
  - (b) The number of students graduated;
  - (c) The number of students dismissed or withdrawn;
  - (d) The number of students sitting for the licensure test; and
  - (e) The percentage of students taking the test for the first (1st) time and passing the licensure test.
- (2) A copy of the report filed with THEC or TBR is deemed to meet the requirements of this rule.

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 4-5-202, 4-5-204, 63-18-111, and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed March 24, 2006; effective June 7, 2006. Amendment filed April 9, 2012; effective July 8, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a stay of the rules on July 2, 2012; new effective date August 3, 2012. The Government Operations Committee filed a second stay of the rules on July 13, 2012; new effective date September 6, 2012.

**0870-02-.08 REPEALED.**

**Authority:** T.C.A. §§ 63-18-111 and 63-18-115. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed April 9, 2009; effective June 23, 2009. Repeal filed May 19, 2017; effective August 17, 2017.