



February 7, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Maryland General Assembly
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 789

Dear Delegate Atterbeary:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to express support for HB 789, which would include audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) who possess the ASHA Certificate of Clinical Competence, under the alternative high-quality educator credential, making them eligible for a minimum salary as well as a salary increase.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; SLPs; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students. Over 4,100 ASHA members reside in Maryland.¹ Audiologists are trained professionals who diagnose, manage, and treat hearing and balance disorders. Educational audiologists provide a wide variety of services to children in school settings while collaborating with fellow multidisciplinary team members to effectively facilitate student listening, learning, and communication access. SLPs are uniquely educated and trained to assess and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive communication disorders in children and adults. These services help children acquire language and enable people to recover essential skills to communicate about their health and safety, to swallow adequate nutrition safely, and to have sufficient attention, memory, and organizational skills to function in their environment.

Audiologists possessing the CCC-A must meet high educational standards that include 3-4 years of full-time study while completing a clinical doctoral degree (AuD), a clinical practicum, and a praxis exam.² SLPs holding the CCC-SLP must also meet high educational standards that include a master's degree, passing a praxis exam, and completion of a clinical fellowship.³ ASHA certified audiologists and SLPs must accumulate at least 30 professional development hours every three years and abide by ASHA's Code of Ethics to maintain their certification.

Schools have difficulties recruiting and retaining audiologists and SLPs because of the daily challenges these professionals face. Educational audiologists and school-based SLPs often experience high volumes of paperwork along with high caseloads that can include a range of students who may have complex communication disorders or are considered medically fragile.⁴ Additionally, these practitioners may have to take on duties outside of their normal scope due to personnel shortages.⁵ HB 789 will help recognize audiologists and SLPs with additional income that is more aligned with the education and skills they hold in comparison to other school personnel. The bill may also reduce the number of contractors who are temporarily filling vacant positions at higher costs.

Thank you for considering ASHA's support for this bill. HB 789 will help to ensure enhanced recruitment and retention of highly qualified, ASHA certified professionals who serve those most in need in the Maryland schools. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director of state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Tena L. McNamara, AuD, CCC-A/SLP
2024 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *Maryland [Quick Facts]*.
<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/maryland-state-flyer.pdf>

² American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Ensure Your District Provides Mandated Speech-Language Special Education Evaluation and Services*.

<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/alternative-hq-educator-credential-slp.pdf>

³ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Ensure Your District Provides Mandated Hearing Special Education Evaluation and Services*.

<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/alternative-hq-educator-credential-audiology.pdf>

⁴ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *2022 School Survey: SLP Caseload and Workload Characteristics*. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/surveys/2022-schools-survey-slp-caseload.pdf>

⁵ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *2022 School Survey: SLP Workforce and Work Conditions*. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/surveys/2022-schools-survey-slp-workforce.pdf>