



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

October 30, 2023

The Honorable Jason Lewis
The Honorable Denise Garlick
Joint Committee on Education
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H. 3943

Dear Senator Lewis and Representative Garlick:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to oppose language in H. 3943, which establishes a committee on kindergarten readiness that is duplicative and unnecessary.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students. Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive-communication disorders. Over 5,800 ASHA members reside in Massachusetts¹.

Children with disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH), may not always have the services and supports they need to access the curriculum and achieve academic success. Audiologists and SLPs play critical roles in the assessment and treatment provided to D/HH children. ASHA is committed to strengthening existing laws to ensure that state and local agencies adhere to federal law. We support developing and providing families with needed resources and tools that will empower them to identify the most appropriate language/communication mode(s) and influence the decisions made by the individualized family service plan (IFSP)/ individualized education program (IEP) team.

House bill 3943 calls for the creation of a committee on kindergarten readiness composed primarily of individuals who are D/HH to develop resources for parents. However, state education agencies and local school districts are already tasked with assessing all children suspected of having a disability and providing those resources as necessary. They are required by law to utilize qualified providers, such as audiologists and SLPs, and through the IFSP or IEP to create a plan that meets the educational needs of each child with a disability, including those who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired. ASHA believes the state lead agency (i.e., Department of Public Health and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) should be required to develop the parent/family resource using experts throughout the state, not a separate committee. **We are concerned that the committee could impact the decision-making authority of the IFSP and IEP teams required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).**

ASHA appreciates your efforts to improve services and supports for D/HH children and we support many of the tenets proposed in the LEAD-K/AG Bell model legislation, on which this legislation is based, including ensuring that a D/HH child has a functional language whether it is American Sign Language (ASL), spoken language, cued speech, or other language as well as a

combination of languages when they enter school. However, this legislation places an emphasis on ASL as the primary form of communication and we believe in a family's right to decide the most appropriate language(s), communication mode(s), and education plan for their child. Prioritizing one language over another is unfair and limiting.

ASHA appreciates your consideration of our position on H. 3943 to oppose language creating a committee on kindergarten readiness. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Susan Adams, ASHA's director of state legislative and regulatory affairs, at sadams@asha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Augustine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert M. Augustine, PhD, CCC-SLP
2023 ASHA President

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