



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

July 22, 2019

The Honorable Jason Lewis
The Honorable Alice Hanlon Peisch
Joint Committee on Education
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H.3550/S.305

Dear Senator Lewis and Representative Peisch:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to oppose language in H.3550/S.305, which establishes a task force on kindergarten readiness that is duplicative and unnecessary.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 204,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids. Speech-language pathologists identify, assess, and treat speech and language disorders, including swallowing disorders. Over 5,400 ASHA members reside in Massachusetts.

The task force on kindergarten readiness is charged with advising the Department of Public Health and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on:

- the content and administration of the existing instrument used to assess the development of children with disabilities pursuant to federal law;
- appropriate use of the instrument to assess deaf and hard of hearing children's language and literacy development; and
- recommendations regarding future research to improve the measurement of progress for deaf and hard of hearing children in language and literacy.

However, state education agencies and local school districts are already tasked—under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—with assessing all children suspected of having a disability. They are required by law to utilize qualified providers and through the individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (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.

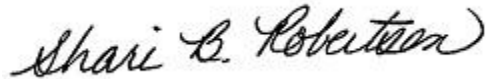
ASHA appreciates your efforts to improve services and supports for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and supports many of the tenets proposed in the LEAD-K/AG Bell model legislation, on which this legislation is based, including ensuring that a child who is deaf or hard of hearing has a functional 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. ASHA supports the development of parent/family resources that are comprehensive and balanced so that parents can choose the best language and communication mode(s) for their child and family. ASHA supports requiring the state lead agency (i.e., Department of Public Health or the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) to

develop the parent/family resource using experts throughout the state as needed. Providing comprehensive information to families will empower them to be active impactful advocates during IFSP/IEP meetings.

ASHA understands that children with disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, may not always have the services and supports they need to access the curriculum and achieve academic success. We are committed to strengthening existing laws to ensure that state and local agencies adhere to federal law. ASHA maintains that providing families with needed resources and tools will empower them to identify the most appropriate language/communication mode(s) and impact the decisions made by the IFSP/IEP team.

ASHA appreciates your consideration of our position on H.3550/S.305 to oppose language creating a task force on kindergarten readiness, which would be duplicative and unnecessary. 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 cursive script that reads "Shari B. Robertson".

Shari B. Robertson, PhD, CCC-SLP
2019 ASHA President