



February 7, 2023

The Honorable Andrew P. Koenig
Missouri Senate
201 W. Capitol Ave.
State Capitol, Room 331A
Jefferson City, MO 65101-1556

RE: SB 410

Dear Senator Koenig:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to oppose Senate Bill 410, which would prohibit public institutions of higher education offering health care-related degrees or certifications from requiring diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI) ideologies or materials for applicants or students during the application process or education at the institution.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 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 (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive communication disorders. Over 4,500 ASHA members reside in Missouri.¹

ASHA opposes SB 410 because it significantly limits the ability for audiology and speech-language pathology programs to appropriately educate and train students for a diverse population of clients, patients, and students. ASHA believes that representation matters, that culturally responsive care is a clinical imperative, and that quality service and optimal outcomes are best achieved by professionals who engage in self-reflection and address power imbalances inherent to (a) educational and health care systems and (b) relationships with clients, patients, students, and families. The restrictions placed by this bill lessen the value of these professional qualities and limits access for professionals assessing and treating communication disorders.

ASHA maintains the critical need for development of syllabi and instructional activities with infusion of multicultural/multilingual issues at higher education institutions to prepare professionals to work with individuals who have communication disorders. While ASHA's Code of Ethics does not cover students, we know that graduating students need to be prepared to become certified members. It is the responsibility of higher education to prepare students for working with all populations, including aspects of bias, identity, language, and diversity.

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's position of SB 410. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Doanne Ward-Williams, ASHA's director of state affairs, at dwardwilliams@asha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Augustine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

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

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