



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

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February 18, 2022

The Honorable Brandon Steele, Chair
Committee on Government Organization
Room 213E, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305

RE: H.B. 4612

Dear Chairman Steele and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to comment in opposition to H.B. 4612, which repeals the scope of practice for health professions in West Virginia, including audiology and speech-language pathology.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 218,000 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, and swallowing disorders. Over 1,000 ASHA members reside in West Virginia.¹

ASHA opposes H.B. 4612 because eliminating a practitioner's scope of practice harms consumers in need of health care services by invalidating the authority of regulatory agencies to enforce the standards and training of health professions. While this legislation intends to put the onus on practitioners to prove their education and training, in reality, the burden falls on West Virginian consumers to identify which providers are duly trained to provide the services they are seeking. Such a policy impacts consumer safety and impedes access to and reimbursement for critical health care services.

Promoting Safe and Effective Practice

The critical responsibilities of health care licensing boards rely on a well-defined scope of practice. The West Virginia Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology & Audiology consists of practitioners from the professions and consumers. The Board ensures that regulatory decisions are based on the technical and scientific knowledge required to practice. The public can rely on the expertise and experience of practicing professionals to ensure that providers are held to the high standards of the profession. The Board's licensure rules, which derive from its scope of practice, protect consumers from harm by:

- helping consumers identify the differences between audiologists, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), and other persons providing services (e.g., paraprofessionals, teachers, hearing aid dispensers);
- supporting and promoting interdisciplinary work and collaborative service delivery with other health professions;
- ensuring that only those with the appropriate qualifications and training can provide audiology and speech-language pathology services;
- deterring the hiring or substitution of others who do not meet the identified criteria for professional practice;
- deterring unethical behavior;
- increasing access to and reimbursement from third-party insurers;
- providing the necessary authority to intervene in cases of provider misconduct; and
- providing a venue for consumers and professionals to seek redress, including censure of individuals who have committed fraud or engaged in otherwise unethical behavior.

Autonomous Practice

Audiologists and SLPs are autonomous health care professionals who work directly with clients, patients, and students, making independent judgments regarding assessing and treating an individual's communication disorder. Audiologists who hold ASHA's Certificate of Clinical Competence in Audiology (CCC-A) hold a clinical doctoral degree, complete over 1,800 hours of clinical training, and must pass a national exam. SLPs who hold ASHA's Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP) are highly skilled professionals who hold—at minimum—a master's degree in communication disorders, complete a supervised clinical fellowship, and pass a nationally standardized examination.

The independent practice of the professions is fully supported and regulated by state licensing entities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. All licensing boards recognize and value the autonomous practice of audiologists and SLPs.

ASHA Supports Removing Barriers to Practice

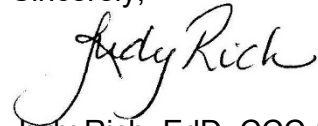
ASHA recognizes that licensing boards must consistently evaluate their regulations and remove unnecessary barriers to practice that do not serve the interest of consumers and providers. To achieve this goal, we strongly recommend that the legislature works with the West Virginia Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology & Audiology and the West Virginia Speech-Language-Hearing Association (WVSHA) when reviewing any regulation affecting these professions. Furthermore, the Board and WVSHA have already advanced several legislative initiatives that reduce barriers to practice including:

- allowing out-of-state providers to practice in West Virginia by registering with the Board instead of obtaining a new license;
- supporting the Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact; and
- waiving fees and certain licensing requirements for military families.

These and other policy initiatives ensure that occupational licensing regulations serve their intended purpose to protect consumers while not unduly burdening professionals seeking employment.

Thank you for the opportunity to share ASHA's position regarding H.B. 4612. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Tim Boyd, ASHA's director of state health care and education affairs, at tboyd@asha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judy Rich".

Judy Rich, EdD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL
2022 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2021). *West Virginia* [Quick Facts]. <https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/West-Virginia-State-Flyer.pdf>.