



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

Student Loan Forgiveness for Service in Areas of National Need

ACTION REQUESTED

Please support funding of at least \$10 million for the *Loan Forgiveness for Service in Areas of National Need* program (P.L.110-315, Title IV, Part B, Section 430) in the Fiscal Year 2010 Department's of Labor-Health & Human Services-Education Appropriations bill. This newly authorized program targets federal loan forgiveness at professions in high need, including school-based Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) and Audiologists, but has yet to receive funding.

BACKGROUND

By providing this modest initial investment, the Appropriations Committee will be able to achieve a threefold return. First, this program can provide targeted economic stimulus by providing an incentive for students to seek employment in fields for which they may not currently be qualified and for which there is an identified national need to fill. Second, in a time of tight credit and depressed personnel spending, loan forgiveness frees up credit, reduces loan burdens on individuals, and encourages professional development. Third, the employment sectors identified in Section 430 are American jobs. These positions cannot be exported, executed remotely, nor be replaced by a machine. Our nation needs skilled and motivated individuals to train and fill these critical vacancies in both speech-language-pathology and audiology.

Section 430 of P.L. 110-315 provides up to \$2,000 a year over five years (\$10,000 in aggregate) in loan forgiveness for professions identified by Congress as to be of "national need". In the report that accompanied the House-passed College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2008 (Rept. 110-500), the Education and Labor Committee stated that, "Our nation's workforce, while strong and vibrant, suffers shortages in key sectors...[and]...believes authorizing loan forgiveness for these areas with demonstrated national need will provide a step in the right direction as the nation works to alleviate shortages in key fields." The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that based upon expenditures for other federal loan forgiveness programs that there would be no additional overhead costs to operate this program. For fiscal year 2010, a modest appropriation of \$10 million would directly benefit 5,000 individuals, a small investment for a large return.

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Impact of SLPs and Audiologists in Schools

- 1) Related services provided to special education students are integral to their success and no related service is more utilized than audiology and speech-language pathology. Children with speech, language, or hearing disorders account for about 30% of all services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and roughly 75% of all school-based Medicaid funds provided for eligible children.¹
- 2) The school-age population is expected to expand over the next decade along with extended services for disabled students. The Department of Education's *24th Annual Report to Congress* indicates that almost half of all school-based speech-language pathologists and audiologists will be eligible for retirement within approximately 15 years. The study concludes that unless the number of newly prepared SLPs increases substantially, a severe shortage will be unavoidable.²
- 3) According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of speech-language pathologists and audiologists is expected to grow over 10 percent from 2006 to 2016.³
- 4) Maintaining a pool of qualified audiologists and speech-language pathologists will assist in decreasing the instances of over-identification and the disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children as having a disability, or as having a particular disability.
- 5) Everyday, an average of 33 babies are born with permanent hearing loss, making hearing loss the number one birth defect in America.^{4 5} When deaf children are not identified early and given appropriate early intervention speech and audiology services, additional special education services beyond what would have otherwise been required can cost the local school district an additional half million dollars.⁶

¹ U.S. Department of Education. *Key Findings. The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPense)*. 7:2002.

² U.S Department of Education. *Ensuring an Adequate Supply of High-Quality, School-Based Speech-Language Pathologists*, (section III). 24th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 2002.

³ U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition. Washington, D.C.; Accessed March 2009. SLP: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos099.htm> and Audiology: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos085.htm> .

⁴ National Center on Hearing Assessment and Management. <http://www.infanthearing.org/research/summary/prevalence.html>.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi/default.htm>.

⁶ Johnson JL, Mauk GW, Takekawa KM, Simon PR, Sia CCJ, Blackwell PM. Implementing a statewide system of services for infants and toddlers with hearing disabilities. *Seminars in Hearing*. 1993;14:105-119.