July 18, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
U.S. Senate
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member, Committee on Armed Services
U.S. Senate
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Chair Reed, and Ranking Member Wicker:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to share our position on the inclusion of certain provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 that would restrict access to gender-affirming care for servicemembers, dependents, and veterans, potentially including gender-affirming voice therapy provided by speech-language pathologists (SLPs). This includes amendments included in H.R. 2670, as well as those that may be offered when the Senate considers S. 2226.

ASHA is concerned with efforts to inhibit patient access to gender-affirming care and attempts to specifically restrict the ability of SLPs to provide gender-affirming voice therapy. We believe that
all individuals, including those who are transgender and gender nonconforming and people with disabilities, have a right to bodily autonomy, self-determination, and equal access to health care.

ASHA opposed the inclusion of amendment #20, which the House adopted during consideration of H.R. 2670, which would prohibit access to certain gender-affirming care services for minor dependents who are enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program by virtue of a chronic condition, medical requirements, behavioral health concern, or qualification for special education. This would unequally restrict access to care for covered dependents with disabilities and could preclude access to gender-affirming voice therapy provided by SLPs.

This amendment and others with ambiguous legislative language about what constitutes a service, treatment, or procedure could impact the ability of SLPs to provide gender-affirming voice therapy to servicemembers, their dependents, and veterans, impairing their health and well-being and reducing troop morale and readiness.

As the Senate begins consideration of S. 2226, we urge you to oppose any amendments that could prevent gender-affirming voice therapy from being provided to servicemembers, dependents, and veterans.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eric Masten, ASHA’s director of federal affairs, education, at emasten@asha.org.

Sincerely,

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