



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

April 4, 2018

The Honorable Patricia Haynes Smith
251 Florida Street, Suite 300
Baton Rouge, LA 70801

RE: HB 199

Dear Representative Smith:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express opposition to HB 199, which would increase the requirements for early intervention providers and school districts to ensure that deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) children have assessment and education plans that emphasize the use of American Sign Language (ASL).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 198,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 2,900 of our members reside in Louisiana.

Commonly known as LEAD-K (Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids) legislation, HB 199 would establish a task force consisting of D/HH teachers, an administrator of an early intervention program for children who are D/HH, parents of D/HH children, an administrator of a school-age program for children who are D/HH, a speech pathologist working with children who are D/HH, a school psychologist working with D/HH students, an early intervention specialist working with D/HH infants and toddlers, two representatives of an association that advocates for children who are D/HH, one representative of the State Department of Education, one adult who is D/HH and who is proficient in ASL, a member of the House and Senate, one representative of the Department of Health, one pediatric audiologist, and the Executive Director of the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf. HB 199 charges the Task Force with making recommendations that include, but are not limited to, developing the framework for assessing children who are D/HH. ASHA believes that this bill, supported by a LEAD-K effort through the National Association for the Deaf, would establish a new precedent of placing hearing disabilities ahead of others identified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by adding disability specific mandates and requiring additional resources only for students who are D/HH.

LEAD-K

The LEAD-K campaign promotes legislative efforts to ensure that children who are D/HH have early access to ASL. Campaign proponents believe that many children who are D/HH are not kindergarten ready because they do not have the foundation of a visual language. While ASL may be the most appropriate choice for some children, ASHA does not believe that this should be the only communication option that is made available to families as there are many options

available, including cued speech, spoken language, augmentative and alternative communication, or a combination of multiple modalities.

Task Force Responsibilities

HB 199 proposes that the Task Force review and make recommendations relative to tools or assessments for educators to use for assessing language and literacy development of children who are D/HH, determining how the tools or assessments should be used for children from birth to age five, identifying language development milestones for children who are D/HH, identifying procedures and methods for reporting language acquisition, assessment results, milestones, assessment tools used, and progress of such children, and making recommendations relative to ensuring that state laws and state and local policies are adequately addressing the language development needs of these children.

The requirements in the bill are already required under IDEA and must be included in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or the Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning process. ASHA is concerned that HB 199 would undermine the statutory authority of the IFSP/IEP team, which must include professionals knowledgeable about the assessment and services needed for children with disabilities including those children who are D/HH and their parents.

Role of the Family in Determining the Mode(s) of Communication for their Child

ASHA recognizes that families are the primary decision makers for choosing the desired mode of communication for a child who is D/HH. Furthermore, ASHA believes that families require information about all available communication options in order to make informed decisions.

IDEA

Importance of a Comprehensive Assessment

IDEA requires early intervention programs and schools to administer a comprehensive assessment to students who are suspected of having a disability. The assessment team must include qualified providers who are trained to assess the full range of the suspected disability, including communication disorders. Evaluators must administer appropriate assessments and recommend interventions and supports based on the child's needs and their family's priorities.

Speech-Language Pathologists are Highly Qualified Communication Professionals

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are trained professionals who assess and treat communication disorders. SLPs complete a comprehensive education program that meets rigorous standards of practice based on objective methodology, including a master's or doctoral degree in communication sciences and disorders; a minimum of 400 clock hours of clinical experience supervised by SLPs holding the ASHA Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC); a passing score on a national examination administered and validated by the Educational Testing Service; and completion of a supervised Clinical Fellowship to meet the requirements of the CCC, the recognized standard in the field. SLPs are regulated in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and must complete 30 hours of professional development activities every 3 years.

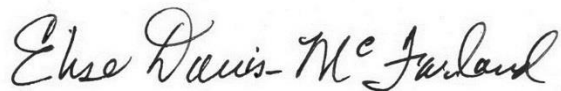
Role of the IFSP or IEP Team

An IFSP or IEP team consists of qualified providers and parents who meet to develop an individualized program to address the student's needs. Families who are dissatisfied with their child's goals or progress on their IFSP/IEP have the right, under IDEA, to request additional assessments or changes to the IFSP/IEP.

ASHA opposes legislation, like HB 199, that would establish a new precedent of placing hearing disabilities ahead of others identified in IDEA by adding disability specific mandates and requiring additional resources only for students who are D/HH. ASHA recommends enforcing mandates included in IDEA that utilize talented professionals, including SLPs, who work with students who are D/HH every day, rather than creating costly and redundant systems that violate the tenets of IDEA.

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's opposition to HB199. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director of state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elise Davis-McFarland".

Elise Davis-McFarland, PhD, CCC-SLP
2018 ASHA President