



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

May 27, 2020

Submitted via email: sh&w@legis.la.gov

The Honorable Fred H. Mills, Jr., Chairman
Senate Health and Welfare Committee
900 North Third Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

RE: HB 589

Dear Chairman Mills and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write in support of HB 589, which enhances coverage and clarifies reimbursement procedures for telehealth under the Louisiana Medicaid program.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 211,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 3,100 ASHA members reside in Louisiana.

As the leading national organization for the certification and advancement of audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs), ASHA supports the development and use of telemedicine, telepractice, and telehealth. ASHA maintains a collection of professional practice documents, including a position statement that defines telepractice as “the application of telecommunications technology to deliver professional services at a distance by linking clinician to client or clinician to clinician for assessment, intervention, and/or consultation.”¹

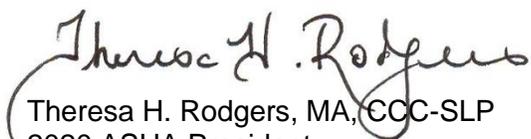
ASHA strongly supports the use of telehealth. Research demonstrates the equivalence of telehealth to in-person service delivery for a wide range of diagnostic and treatment procedures for adults and children.² Studies have shown high levels of patient, clinician, and parent satisfaction supporting telehealth as an effective alternative to the in-person model for delivery of care.³ Telehealth expands practitioners’ availability to those in need—regardless of geographic location—saving time and resources for both the provider and the patient.

Despite proven benefits, telehealth remains underutilized within audiology and speech-pathology practices due to a lack of clear state laws governing its use or mandating appropriate reimbursement for services delivered. HB 589 addresses underutilization by requiring the Department of Health to review its coverage policies for telehealth to ensure they are comparable to those of the federal Medicare program. The bill requires the Department to publish an exhaustive list of telehealth services covered by the state Medicaid program along with appropriate reimbursement procedures for those services. While ASHA maintains that the state can do more to ensure services provided by audiologists and SLPs via telehealth are reimbursed on the same basis as in-person services, the policy changes made by HB 589 will have a positive impact on Louisiana consumers and ASHA members.

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Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's position to support HB 589. 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,



Theresa H. Rodgers, MA, CCC-SLP
2020 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Telepractice*. Retrieved from <http://www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Telepractice/>.

² Grogan-Johnson, S., Alvares, R., Rowan, L., & Creaghead, N. (2010). A pilot study comparing the effectiveness of speech language therapy provided by telemedicine with conventional on-site therapy. *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, 16, 134–139.

³ Ibid.