



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Mikie Sherrill
1208 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David McKinley
2239 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Sherrill and McKinley:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to thank you for your leadership by introducing H.R. 8755, the Expanded Telehealth Access Act.

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. 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 and language problems, including swallowing disorders.

It is critical to ensure that audiologists and SLPs can provide medically necessary services and treatment safely and effectively, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Members of both professions are licensed in every state to provide diagnostic and treatment services, while many private payers, and other government programs, such as Medicaid, allow them to provide care through the use of telehealth. Unfortunately, arbitrary and unnecessary federal restrictions prevent these health care professionals from providing telehealth services to Medicare beneficiaries, those who are at an especially high-risk to this deadly virus because of their age and/or underlying health conditions, and who often live in rural and underserved areas where access to such services may be limited.

ASHA appreciates your previous support for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Public Law 116-136), which included provisions enabling the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to waive restrictions on the types of providers who can deliver telehealth services during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Expanded Telehealth Access Act will ensure that Medicare beneficiaries have permanent access to important hearing, balance, speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive care provided through telehealth to promote the safety of both patients and providers and increase access to these services in rural and underserved areas. ASHA looks forward to working with you and your staff to pass H.R. 8755 through the U.S. House of Representatives.

Thank you again for your leadership on H.R. 8755. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Jerry White, ASHA's director of federal affairs for health care, at jwhite@asha.org.

Sincerely,

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