



**ASHA**

American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

November 8, 2023

The Honorable Jason Smith  
Chair, Committee on Ways and Means  
1139 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Neal  
Ranking Member, Committee on Ways and Means  
1129 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Neal:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to share our support for the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act (H.R. 1477/S. 722), which was among the topics discussed during the Committee's hearing titled "Educational Freedom and Opportunity for American Families, Students, and Workers."

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLPs); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students. Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids. SLPs identify, assess, and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive-communication disorders.

State-sponsored 529 educational savings accounts are currently exempt from federal taxes when they are used to pay for qualified education expenses including college, graduate, or professional degrees; education programs from Title IV accredited institutions; registered apprenticeships; and certain K-12 tuition and student loan repayments. However, under current law, 529 plan beneficiaries cannot use funds to obtain or maintain recognized postsecondary credentials, including professional certifications, licenses, and other valuable training or credentials that increase skill and knowledge and improve care.

Audiologists must earn a clinical doctorate degree and SLPs must earn a master's degree, while both must obtain state licensure to practice. Audiology assistants and SLP assistants have multiple educational pathway opportunities for both licensure and certification. Preconditions to obtain and maintain state licensure can include passage of a national certification examination (or evidence of meeting certification requirements) and certain continuing education requirements.

ASHA urges the Committee to advance H.R. 1477 and provide flexibility for beneficiaries to use plan funds to cover the educational, training, or credentialing programs that best fit their initial and ongoing skills development, professional growth, and career needs. Doing so would increase opportunities for ASHA members and improve access to care for the people they serve.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eric Masten, ASHA's director of federal affairs for education, at [emasten@asha.org](mailto:emasten@asha.org).

Sincerely,

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