



May 30, 2019

The Honorable Pat Spearman
5575 Simmons Street, Suite 1-174
North Las Vegas, NV 89031-9009

RE: SB 203

Dear Senator Spearman:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to oppose language in SB 203, which establishes an Advisory Committee on Language Development for Children who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind or Visually Impaired. Creating a separate advisory committee is costly and unnecessary, and the lack of input by qualified professionals including audiologists and speech-language pathologists extends to the regulated criteria from the State Board of Education for use by school employees and providers of services to assess the development of language and literacy skills in these children.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 204,000 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 identify, assess, and treat speech and language disorders, including swallowing disorders. Over 800 ASHA members reside in Nevada.

The advisory committee is tasked with recommending to the State Board of Education criteria for use by parents and guardians to evaluate the development of language and literacy skills by children who are less than 6 years old and are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired without including an audiologist or speech-language pathologist (SLP). However, state education agencies and local school districts are already tasked, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), with assessing all children suspected of having a disability. They are required by law to utilize qualified providers and through the individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP) to create a plan that meets the educational needs of each child with a disability, including those who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired.

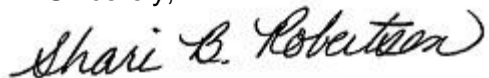
ASHA supports many of the tenets proposed in the LEAD-K/AG Bell model legislation, on which this legislation is based, including ensuring that a child who is deaf or hard of hearing has a functional language whether it is American Sign Language (ASL), spoken language, cued speech, or other language as well as a combination of languages, when they enter school. ASHA supports the development of parent resources that are comprehensive and balanced so that parents can choose the best language and communication mode(s) for their child and family. ASHA supports requiring the state lead agency (i.e., Department of Education or the Department of Health) to develop the parent/family resource using experts throughout the state as needed. Providing comprehensive information to families will empower them to be active impactful advocates during IFSP/IEP meetings.

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ASHA understands that children with disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, may not always have the services and supports they need to access the curriculum and achieve academic success. We are committed to strengthening existing laws to ensure that state and local agencies adhere to federal law. ASHA maintains that providing families with needed resources and tools will empower them to identify the most appropriate language/communication mode and impact the decisions made by the IFSP/IEP team.

ASHA appreciates your efforts to improve services and supports for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. 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 "Shari B. Robertson".

Shari B. Robertson, PhD, CCC-SLP
2019 ASHA President