



February 15, 2022

The Honorable David S. Wilson
Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Social Services
120 4th Street Room 205
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

RE: Support for Telehealth; SB 175

Dear Senator Wilson:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write in support of SB 175, with amendments, which addresses telehealth services and reimbursement.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 218,000 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, language, and swallowing disorders. Over 400 ASHA members reside in Alaska.¹

ASHA supports the provisions allowing a licensed health care provider to offer services within their scope of practice to patients in Alaska via telehealth without first conducting an in-person examination. We recommend amending the language in Sec. 08.01.085. Telehealth. (a) to state:

“If a health care provider is licensed in another state, the health care provider may provide services under this section only to a patient who is referred by a health care provider licensed under this title or a federal or tribal health care program or to patients who have a pre-existing patient-provider relationship with a provider licensed in another state.”

Adding this language will ease the ability of residents who do not live in Alaska full-time to seek the care they need.

As the leading national organization for the certification and advancement of audiologists and speech-language pathologists, ASHA supports the development and use of telehealth, also referred to as *telepractice* and *telemedicine*. ASHA maintains a collection of professional practice documents, including a position statement that defines telehealth 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.”²

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.³ 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.⁴ 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-language pathology due to a lack of clear state laws governing its use or mandating appropriate reimbursement for services delivered.

Senate Bill 175 addresses these barriers by requiring that a fee for a service provided through telehealth must be reasonable and consistent with the ordinary fee charged for that service provided in person and may not exceed the ordinary fee charged for that service.

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's position to support SB 175 with amendments. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director of state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Judy Rich, EdD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL
2022 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2021). *Alaska* [Quick Facts].
<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedfiles/alaska-state-flyer.pdf>.

² American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Telepractice. Retrieved from
<https://www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Telepractice/>.

³ Grogan-Johnson, S., Alvares, R., Rowan, L., & Craghead, 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.

⁴ Ibid.