



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Statement for the Record for the House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

Hearing on Occupational Licensing: Reducing Barriers to Economic Mobility and Growth

June 20, 2018

Chairman Guthrie, Representative Scott, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I, Elise Davis-McFarland, President of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, appreciate the opportunity to provide this statement for the record to the Subcommittee's hearing on occupational licensure.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 198,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists, speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students.

Overview

Occupational licensure for all health care professionals, including audiologists and speech-language pathologists, is critical to ensure patient safety and consumer protection. Health care professionals provide diagnosis and treatment of complex medical conditions. Licensure for health care professionals provides a critical and necessary means by which to ensure that health care professionals possess the technical, scientific, and clinical knowledge required to competently address the health care needs of their patients.

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are autonomous professionals that work directly with clients/patients making independent judgments regarding the assessment and treatment of an individual's communication disorder. Graduate education provides audiologists and SLPs with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to practice independently. The independent practice of the professions is fully supported and regulated by state licensing entities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. All licensing boards recognize and value the autonomous practice of audiologists and SLPs.

Regulatory oversight legislated at the state level through licensure is the accepted practice for consumer protection. Regulatory boards, including audiology and speech-language pathology, consist of practitioners in the profession being regulated and consumers of the services provided by the regulated profession. The public can rely on the expertise and wisdom of practicing professionals to ensure that those in practice are held to the high standards of the profession.

While licensure is essential to ensure public safety, reciprocity of licensure is needed to ensure there is a full complement of professionals to serve consumers in the state. Interstate occupational licensure compacts are being developed to facilitate licensure portability and reciprocity for professionals while preserving state oversight and consumer protections. In recent years, states have passed a number of health care related licensure compacts, including the enhanced nurse licensure compact, the physical therapy compact, and the medical licensure

compact. These compacts address the deficit of health professionals serving rural America and increase access to practitioners and services. Interstate compacts are also an excellent way to ease the burdens of frequent deployments for America's military families by bringing regulatory certainty to state occupational licensure requirements.

ASHA is committed, through the development of the interstate compact, to reducing practitioner shortages, improving access to underserved areas and easing the burden on military families. ASHA is currently partnering with the Council of State Governments, the National Council of State Boards of Examiners and the Department of Defense, State Liaison Office in a multiyear process to establish an Interstate Licensure Compact for Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists. We believe the Interstate Licensure Compact would also ease the costs of licensure and administrative burdens on practitioners.

Background on Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology

Audiology Professional Qualifications

Audiologists earn a clinical doctoral degree and are highly qualified to conduct comprehensive assessments that determine hearing loss, auditory function, balance and related systems, and evaluate, select, and dispense hearing aids. Audiologists also assess the candidacy of individuals with hearing loss for cochlear implants and work with medical teams to provide fitting, mapping, and audiologic rehabilitation to optimize the use of these devices.

Speech-Language Pathology Professional Qualifications

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are highly skilled professionals who, at minimum, hold a master's degree in communication disorders from an accredited program recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. SLPs complete a challenging education and training program, a supervised clinical fellowship, and must pass a nationally standardized examination.

SLPs assess, treat, and help prevent a variety of communication disorders involving speech, language, fluency (e.g., stuttering), voice and resonance problems, cognitive communication disorders such as memory, attention and problem-solving disorders, and swallowing and associated feeding disorders. SLPs provide services in a variety of practice settings ranging from schools to institutions such as hospitals and rehabilitation centers, early intervention programs, and private practice.

ASHA Certification: Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC)

ASHA certification ensures competencies for audiologists and speech-language pathologists. The Certificate of Clinical Competence is earned through a voluntary certification process; therefore, the requirements of certificate holders are only applicable to those who choose to be certified. ASHA has no legal recourse against those who violate the ASHA Code of Ethics other than to revoke their certification. In the absence of state authority over the practice of audiology and speech-language pathology, an individual may continue to practice despite unethical or incompetent service.

To maintain their certification, Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC), audiologists and speech-language pathologists must complete professional development activities every three years.

Licensure and ASHA Certification

Both licensure and ASHA certification help ensure the quality provision of audiology and speech-language pathology services. State licensure provides consumer protection and recourse against incompetent practitioners and/or those acting in an unethical manner so that they may be removed from practice. ASHA certification is the fundamental standard among major health professions and the most widely recognized symbol of competency for audiologists (CCC-A) and speech-language pathologists (CCC-SLP). Individuals holding the CCCs are expected to abide by ASHA's Code of Ethics. While licensure is important to legally perform our work, certification is important for internal professional recognition and external accountability.

Conclusion

ASHA appreciates this opportunity to convey the critical importance that licensure of health care professionals has on ensuring patient safety and consumer protection. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Ingrida Lusic, ASHA's director of federal and political affairs, at ilusic@asha.org.