

April 14, 2023

Senate on Health and Welfare Committee

115 State Street, Room 11
Montpelier, VT 05602

Remarks of
Melissa L. Clark
Audiologist

Support of: H.86 - An act relating to Vermont's adoption of the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact

Testimony

I am grateful for the opportunity to support H.86 and the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC), which addresses licensing issues.

The purpose of the ASLP-IC is to facilitate interstate practice of audiology and speech-language pathology with the goal of improving public access to services, while preserving the regulatory authority of states to protect public health and safety through the current system of state licensure.

My name is Melissa Clark, and I am an audiologist in the state of Vermont. I work in Middlebury at Porter Medical Center. In addition, I serve on our state board for audiologists and speech-language pathologists, as well as, serve with our national association as an Audiology Committee of Ambassador where my charge is to advocate for change in line with the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) public policy agenda.

Surveys have been completed at both the state and national level which supports the importance of the compact and need for services from audiologist and speech-language pathologists. In our most recent state survey, the Vermont Speech-Language Hearing Association (VSHA) found that 86% of respondents considered our organization pursuing this legislative effort as important to very important. In addition, surveys show continued need for services. A recent ASHA survey revealed that 36.6% of survey respondents reported funded, unfilled positions in their facility in New England States.

The ASLP-IC would address licensing barriers and streamline the licensing process for professionals to come to our state. Licensing requirements vary greatly among states in regards to the number of CEUs one needs to obtain to keep their license, what exams have to be taken, and the certifications needed. As part of the VSHA board for over 6 years, one of our most common questions from professionals is in regards to licensing.

ASLP-IC seeks to eliminate barriers to interstate professional audiology and speech-language

pathology practice and improve patient access to professional services. Opening up the licensing laws will allow providers to work in our state and allow for better sharing of resources among our states in the Northeast region. This in turn could reduce workloads for professionals and increase patient access to services.

To share a most recent personal account, an audiologist reached out to VSHA due to her daughter needing early intervention speech services. This professional is well versed in the world of early intervention and is still struggling to get her daughter assessments and supports she is in need of. She advised that her child has been on a waitlist for early intervention in Rutland County for over a year. In addition, she advised when speaking to the speech-language pathologist at Rutland Regional Medical Center it was discussed there are over 150 kids on the waitlist for early intervention assessments and services at this hospital alone. This is a common theme heard in our field and reveals the crisis our state is in.

It is our hope that with your support of this bill it will increase access to patient care and reduce the workloads of our overstretched audiologists and speech-language pathologists.

In closing, I am grateful for your time to consider this testimony and appreciate the opportunity to support the passage of the policies reflected in H.86 and the enactment of the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact.

As always, I stand ready to answer whatever questions you may have.

Sincerely,
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