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From: Washington West Supervisory Union Speech-Language Pathologists  
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Re: Senate Bill S.217

**Position Statement: The Speech-language Pathologists of the Washington West Supervisory Union do not support the removal of the educational Speech Language Pathology (6-84) endorsement from the Agency of Education.**

As currently employed Speech-language Pathologists employed by the WWSU, this statement is to explain our strong opposition to S.217. This bill will have negative impacts not only on Vermont's school-based SLPs, but a far wider reaching negative impact on Vermont's children, especially those with disabilities.

We are all certified and licensed school-based SLPs, and as such are considered integral and necessary components of our respective schools' teaching staff. We all hold Vermont educator licenses as SLPs, as well as current ASHA (American Speech and Hearing Association) certification. Yes, we are clinically trained providers who have expertise in communication disorders. In addition to this, we are highly trained in all special education procedures and laws. I (and many of my colleagues) hold, in addition to our Master's Certification, 45 or more graduate level credits in a wide variety of education topics. We are teachers!

Viewing the role of a “teacher” as one who teaches core classes is a very narrow one. In today’s complex world, we work as a school-based team to teach the “whole child”. Communication skills are at the core of all learning. Instruction in core academics is of course important, but every student also needs to learn to comprehend the material, to be able to express and demonstrate what they know, to form positive relationships, and learn to function in society in order to be successful in life. The goal of the Common Core is to prepare our students for life, and for many students to achieve this, the role of the SLP in the schools is vital.

The relationship between early speech/language delays and literacy disabilities has long been proven. The identification and early intervention we provide is crucial for the educational success of many children. We also have expertise in working with English Language Learners (ELLs), whose population in Vermont is increasing. We work closely as a full team member to promote the success of all of our students. Our team membership and contribution is as important as that of the science or math teacher.

The job of a school-based SLP is very different from that in a clinical setting. Many of us have been teaching for 20 or more years in our schools. Yes, we are SLPs...but this job is no longer teaching children articulation skills (i.e. how to say their /r/s). This aspect of our job has in fact become a very small portion of our professional teaching duties. We are aligned with the Common Core, working towards proficiency in written and oral expression and written and oral language comprehension. We run reading groups; we work closely with school guidance counselors to implement Social Thinking® groups. We modify curriculum and differentiate instruction to allow our students with disabilities to access the general curriculum in content areas. As SLPs we have a vast fund of knowledge in working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD); another critical skill set given the rise in this population in Vermont. We case manage students, often involving large multi-disciplinary teams. In some of our schools, the SLPs case manage as many or more students than do our special educators. We often are the case managers of students with intensive needs, given our expertise with a wide variety of disabilities and syndromes. We as SLPs are also all certified to work as EEE (Early Essential Education) providers. We are responsible for child find in our communities. Early identification, assessment, family support and intervention are all crucial elements of our job.

As long time school employees, we are veteran NEA members, have been paying into our teacher’s retirement system for decades, and are included under the master teacher’s contract. We all work for lower hourly wages than our private practitioner counterparts, with benefits associated with the professional teacher’s contract -- health care and retirement -- making this possible. We work in schools because we love teaching and working with children.

It is crucial that AOE licensure continue for both the benefit of the SLPs, as well as the needs of Vermont’s students. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A.), SLP services are considered to be “special education” as well as a related service, to provide

specially designed instruction to allow students to access their free appropriate public education.

We are SLPs, we are clinicians, but above all we are teachers. We are an integral part of the professional teaching staff of our schools. We share the joys and challenges of all educators. Our work directly impacts student success in so many ways. As full-fledged members of the the teaching staff of our schools, we should continue to be governed by the VSBPE and licensed through the AOE, to be bound by the rules and regulations of professional teachers, and to share in the benefits reaped both by being members of the NEA and through our teacher contracts.

Thank you for your consideration of this statement.