



Submitted via email: AHussey@leg.state.vt.us

April 22, 2022

**The Honorable Sarah Copeland Hanzas
Chair
House Committee on Government Operations Vermont General Assembly
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633
RE: Testimony in Support of VT H.577**

Dear Representative Copeland Hanzas and Members of the Committee:

My name is Melissa Clark. I am a clinical audiologist at Porter Medical Center in Middlebury, Vermont. In my position at Porter Medical Center, I test and treat the hearing of patients of all ages and with all severities of hearing loss. In addition to my clinical work, I am an active member of the Vermont Speech-Language Hearing Association (VSHA) and have been since 2017. VSHA is Vermont's professional association representing audiologists and speech-language pathologists. Currently, I am serving on the VSHA Executive Board and am co-leading the association's advocacy efforts in support of H. 577, which adopts the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC).

As part of my duties co-leading VSHA's advocacy efforts, I surveyed the professionals in VSHA's network in January of this year. These survey results were used to help VSHA prioritize their current and upcoming advocacy efforts and provide us a better understanding of the legislative and regulatory priorities of our state. Results relating to the ASLP-IC included that *86% of VSHA's survey respondents ranked the ASLP-IC advocacy work as being important or very important* and revealed that our state's professionals continue to count on our association to help Vermont become a part of the ASLP-IC.

As of current, licensing for audiologists and speech-language pathologists in Vermont is governed by the Office of Professional Regulation (OPR). As VSHA is spearheading this important and timely advocacy work to support the enactment of H.577, *VSHA and its lobbyist have maintained communication with OPR to ensure they are not opposed to us moving forward with this.*

In order to reduce repetitive testimony for this informational hearing, I will not reiterate the talking points covered in other submitted testimony but would like to expand on information surrounding state licensing requirements and to provide some examples of variances that can be found between states. Variances in licensing can include national exam requirements, CCC requirements, continuing education hours, and additional required exams or courses. Although some states may have similar requirements, these *licensing requirements can vary considerably among other states in regards to what is needing to be met to obtain the license and renew it.*

Also, due to the small size of our state there are a number of individuals who are already working across state borders and who need to hold two or more licenses. One of our bordering states, New Hampshire, has already joined the compact. Enacting H.577 would allow our state's professionals to keep their VT licenses and to hold a compact license which would cover practice in New Hampshire or any of the other 17 member states. *Becoming a part of the ASLP-IC would streamline the licensing processes and would open access to in-person and teletherapy services.*

Lastly, per a recent survey from ASHA, the American Speech Language and Hearing Association, 36.6% of SLPs in New England States were more likely to report multiple funded, yet unfilled positions when compared to SLPs in other regions of the United States. This data is in line with data assessing the open positions in rural areas across the country. *Joining an Interstate Compact would allow VT employers to recruit SLPs from other states to fill vacancies and to find specialists in the field of audiology and speech-language pathology.* Drawing on the expertise of SLPs and AUDs in member states would improve treatment outcomes for children with low incidence disabilities and for the general population of individuals needing support.

In summary, speech-language pathologists and audiologists would benefit from joining the ASLP-IC, as would the individuals who need these services. Thank you again for your time and consideration

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Clark