



CONNECTICUT SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION, INC.
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Joint Committee on Public Health
Connecticut General Assembly

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee,

HB6265 AAC Speech and Language Pathology is a proposal by another professional group to change the scope of practice of speech and language pathologists by removing the word "diagnose" and replacing it with the word "evaluate." Diagnosis of speech-language disorders has been allowed by our law since it was written in the 1970s. The word diagnose appears in the licensure laws of speech and language pathologists in other states. In our region New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and all but one state in New England have the word diagnose in their speech-language pathology licensure laws. As President of the Connecticut Speech-Language-Hearing Association I do need to make clear that removing the legal authority of Connecticut's 2314 speech and language pathologists to diagnose speech and language disorders will have consequences for citizens seeking speech-language services, for speech and language pathologists, the only professionals qualified to provide those services, and for agencies and institutions employing speech and language pathologists. I, as a representative of the Connecticut Speech-Language-Hearing Association, urge defeat of HB6265 for the following reasons:

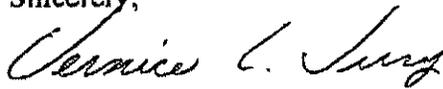
1. Diagnosis is categorizing and determining the cause of a particular state. It is a process not, in any way, limited to a particular profession, field of interest, or even to human problems. The issue is not whether one diagnoses, it is the scope of practice within which one diagnoses. For example, speech and language pathologists do not diagnose medical conditions and this is already covered in our existing law. We do not do medical or surgical diagnostics. We do diagnose speech, language, voice and feeding and swallowing disorders as a first step to planning a course of treatment to improve the client's functional abilities in those areas. That absolutely must be within our scope of practice
2. Some speech and language disorders are based on a medical condition. The majority of speech and language disorders are not based on a medical condition. Speech and language pathologists are the only professionals with the education and training appropriate to diagnose speech and language disorders. This education includes knowing when to advise clients to consult a physician. For the benefit of our clients it is important that we maintain good working relationships with physicians. We work hard to not jeopardize these relationships.

3. The majority of pediatric speech and language diagnostics in Connecticut are completed in the public schools under the umbrella of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Within that federal law speech and language pathologists in the schools are charged with the, "appraisal and diagnosis of specific speech and language impairments." This diagnosis must take place within strict time lines. What are the implications for Connecticut's children with disabilities if school based speech and language pathologists cannot legally diagnose communication disorders?

4. Reimbursement for speech and language services comes through many sources. While some clients are able to pay out of pocket for speech and language services most depend on other sources such as the public schools (with their combination of local, state and federal funding), health insurance, Medicaid or Medicare. Some of these sources require speech and language pathologists to assign a diagnostic code (ICD-9) for billing. These are not medical diagnostic codes but speech-language diagnostic codes. If the speech-language pathologist cannot diagnose, how can he or she assign a speech-language diagnostic code enabling the facility or practitioner to receive appropriate reimbursement for speech and language services? Adults and children who have conditions such as specific birth defects, strokes or traumatic brain injuries who are being treated in hospitals, rehabilitation centers or skilled nursing facilities would be affected.

HB6265 AAC Speech Language Pathology will remove the legal authority to diagnose speech and language disorders from the one group of professionals in Connecticut with the skills, knowledge and expertise to make the diagnosis. For the benefit of every Connecticut citizen in need of the services of a speech and language pathologist I urge you to defeat this bill.

Sincerely,



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