

February 26, 2024

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation
Maryland General Assembly
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Senate Bill 321

Dear Senator Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to express concerns with SB 321, which would transfer \$720,938 from the State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Music Therapists Fund to the Behavioral Health Administration. This Board plays a critical role in protecting the public and ensuring the highest standards of care in our state.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 234,000 members, certificate holders, and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLPs); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 4,250 ASHA members reside in Maryland.¹

This Board is responsible for:

- Licensing and regulating audiologists and SLPs to ensure that professionals have the necessary qualifications and training to provide safe and effective services
- Investigating complaints and taking disciplinary action to protect consumers from unqualified or unethical practitioners
- Enforcing ethical standards and continuing education requirements to promote ongoing professional development and ensuring that practitioners stay up to date with the latest advancements in their fields.

Cutting the Board's budget would have serious consequences. This would result in:

- Reduced oversight and enforcement, leading to an increase in unqualified practitioners and a decline in the quality of care
- Slower processing of licenses, which would create delays for professionals seeking to practice in our state, potentially impacting access to care
- Weakened consumer protection, which could leave vulnerable individuals at risk of harm from unqualified or unethical practitioners.

These professionals play a vital role in helping individuals of all ages overcome communication challenges and improve their quality of life. Employment is projected to grow 11% for audiologists and 18% for SLPs from 2023 to 2033.^{2,3} At a time when the need for audiology and speech-language pathology services is growing, particularly for children and seniors, it is crucial that we invest in the Board, not cut its funding.

ASHA urges you to reject these proposed budget cuts and instead provide the Board with the resources it needs to fulfill its important mission.

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's position. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Susan Adams, ASHA's director of state legislative and regulatory affairs, at sadams@asha.org.

Sincerely,



A. B. Mayfield-Clarke, PhD, CCC-SLP
2025 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2023). *Maryland* [Quick Facts]. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/maryland-state-flyer.pdf>

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). *Occupational Outlook Handbook: Audiologists*. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/audiologists.htm>

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). *Occupational Outlook Handbook: Speech-Language Pathologists*. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/speech-language-pathologists.htm>