



June 21, 2019

The Honorable Robert Menendez
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
379A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senator Menendez and Senator Enzi:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express our support for S. 427, the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support (CARES) Act of 2019.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 204,000 individuals who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. ASHA members work regularly with individuals with autism to address a wide range of communication disorders and comorbidities related to the condition.

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) play a central role in addressing the needs of individuals with autism. Research in audiology confirms that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and hearing impairment can occur in the same individual.^{1,2,3} The similarities in communication and socialization deficits between hearing impairment and ASD populations, along with the possibility of dual diagnosis, make early and differential diagnosis essential. Most newborns are screened and often diagnosed first for hearing loss, which may sometimes delay the separate diagnosis for ASD. SLPs contribute to the independence and productivity of individuals with ASD by ensuring effective functional communication systems or approaches (including Augmentative and Alternative Communication [(AAC)] that allow them to attain and maintain maximum levels of functional communication.

ASHA applauds you for your steadfast leadership in this area and for working with the autism community in crafting this critical legislation. ASHA supports its passage to ensure the continuation of important autism research and coordination of initiatives. If you or your staff have any questions or if we can help you in your efforts to improve access to care for individuals with autism, please contact Jerry White, ASHA's director of federal affairs, health care, at jwhite@asha.org.

Sincerely,

Shari B. Robertson, PhD, CCC-SLP
2019 ASHA President

¹ Easterbrooks, S. R., & Handley, C. M. (2005). Behavior change in a student with a dual diagnosis of deafness and pervasive development disorder: A case study. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 150(5), 401–407.

² Malandraki, G. A., & Okalidou, A. (2007). The application of PECS in a deaf child with autism: A case study. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 22(1), 23–32.

³ Szymanski, C., & Brice, P. J. (2008). When autism and deafness coexist in children: What we know now. *Odyssey: New Directions in Deaf Education*, 9(1), 10–15.