



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

January 15, 2024

The Honorable William Bush, Chair
The Honorable William Carson, Vice Chair
Economic Development/Banking/Insurance & Commerce Committee
Delaware General Assembly
411 Legislative Avenue
Dover, DE 19901

RE: HB 273

Dear Representatives Bush and Carson:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express support for HB 273, which would require insurance coverage for speech therapy services.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students. Over 600 ASHA members reside in Delaware.¹

ASHA supports HB 273, which would require insurance plans to include coverage for any therapy or services required to treat a child diagnosed with phonological disorder or receptive language disorder. In addition, we recommend adding required coverage for expressive language delays and social communication disorder, as well as extending coverage for children beyond age 6.²

During the critical period to speech and language development between birth and age 5, a child's central nervous system is rapidly developing in response to auditory, visual, and tactile stimulation. If communication skills are not developing normally, therapy should begin immediately in order to take advantage of this critical period. If therapy is delayed, the brain becomes "hard-wired." As a result, it takes much longer to achieve results through therapy—and the outcomes of treatment are often less successful.³ Extending coverage for children beyond age 6, allows for the extra time necessary to make an impact.

Children who need—but do not receive—speech, language, and/or hearing services can ultimately drive-up health care and other societal costs. Untreated speech, language, and hearing disorders may lead to poor school performance, behavior disorders, mental health issues, and limited vocational potential. However, if treated early, these children can receive a chance to reach their full potential and contribute even more to society.⁴

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,

Tena L. McNamara, AuD, CCC-A/SLP
2024 ASHA President

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

² American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Social communication disorder [Practice portal].
www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Clinical-Topics/Social-Communication-Disorder/.

³ Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. (n.d.). Speech Therapy for Children: A Smart Investment. Retrieved from <https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/search?q=a+smart+investment&site=entire-site&start=10>. [Download]

⁴ Ibid.