



March 6, 2023

The Honorable Justin Lafferty, Chair
Higher Education Subcommittee
506 Cordell Hull Bldg.
Nashville, TN 37243

The Honorable Jon Lundberg, Chair
Education Committee
744 Cordell Hull Bldg.
Nashville, TN 37243

RE: HB 571/SB 603

Dear Chairman Lafferty, Chairman Lundberg, and Members of the Committees:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to oppose House Bill 571 and Senate Bill 603, which would prohibit public institutions of higher education offering health care-related degrees or certifications from requiring diversity-equity-inclusion (DEI) ideologies or materials for applicants or students during the application process or education at the institution.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive communication disorders. Over 3,900 ASHA members reside in Tennessee¹

ASHA opposes HB 571 and SB 603 because it significantly limits the ability for audiology and speech-language pathology programs to appropriately educate and train students for a diverse population of clients, patients, and students. ASHA believes that representation matters, that culturally responsive care is a clinical imperative, and that quality service and optimal outcomes are best achieved by professionals who engage in self-reflection and address power imbalances inherent to (a) educational and health care systems and (b) relationships with clients, patients, students, and families. The restrictions placed by this bill lessen the value of these professional qualities and limits access for professionals assessing and treating communication disorders.

ASHA maintains the critical need for development of syllabi and instructional activities with infusion of multicultural/multilingual issues at higher education institutions to prepare professionals to work with individuals who have communication disorders. While ASHA's Code of Ethics does not cover students, we know that graduating students need to be prepared to become certified members. It is the responsibility of higher education to prepare students for working with all populations, including aspects of bias, identity, language, and diversity.

Thank you for your consideration of ASHA's position on HB 571 and SB 603. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Tim Boyd, ASHA's director of state health care and education affairs, at tboyd@asha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Augustine". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Robert M. Augustine, PhD, CCC-SLP
2023 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *Tennessee* [Quick Facts].
<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/tennessee-state-flyer.pdf>.