



March 1, 2023

Senator Brian Feldman, Chairman
Education, Energy & Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

Senator Guy Guzzone, Chairman
Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary, Chair
House Ways & Means Committee
131 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SUPPORT SB 791 / HB 883 – Public School – Job Duties & Salaries

Dear Chairman Feldman, Chairman Guzzone and Chair Atterbeary,

My name is Mary Casper. I am a resident of District 15, a Maryland-licensed speech-language pathologist, and currently serve as President of the Maryland Speech-Language-Hearing Association (MSHA) representing speech-language pathologists and audiologists living and working in Maryland.

MSHA believes the passage of SB 791 / HB 883 is essential to ensure recruitment, retention, and adequate staffing of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in Maryland public schools.

Maryland's shortage of SLPs in public schools limits the state's ability to meet the needs of Maryland's children and legal obligations force jurisdictions to pay for compensatory awards to families when those needs are not met. Currently, SLPs have the third highest rate of vacancies in Maryland schools (MSDE, Maryland's Teacher Workforce: Supply, Demand, and Diversity, 2022). As a result, local jurisdictions pay millions more in education dollars to contract with SLPs rather than to hire local SLPs for the school system.

Staff shortages for SLPs is a national issue. Maryland school districts are competing with other states and medical facilities to recruit, hire, and retain qualified staff. Salary incentives will help districts competitively recruit and retain SLPs in Maryland schools so our students get the support they need.

MSHA asserts that SB 791 / HB 883 would allow Maryland schools to minimize use of contractual SLP staff. Districts are spending additional millions on contractual SLPs each year due to staff shortages. Hundreds of contractors are temporarily filling the unstaffed positions at a cost of approximately \$500 to \$700 per day and on an annual basis up to \$40,000 or more for each contractual SLP than if a full-time SLP were hired for the school.

Local education agencies directly hiring SLPs versus contracting with outside agencies represents a long-term investment in the local community. Directly-hired SLPs participate in staff meetings, mandatory trainings, and can become versed and invested in key educational initiatives for children with communication disorders, like trauma-informed care and literacy. Directly-hired SLPs have the opportunity to form relationships with children, parents, teachers, and other educational support staff whereas contractors often work virtually and are unlikely to engage in the activities creating expertise over time.

MSHA asserts that fully staffing Maryland schools with directly-hired SLPs by offering salary incentives as cited in SB 791 / HB 883 will be a net savings for Maryland education expenditures. The cost of separation, recruitment, hiring, and training has been estimated to cost between \$9,000 and \$21,000 per staff member. (Maryland's Teacher Workforce: Supply, Demand, and Diversity, 2022).

MSHA's aim is to maximize student success. The recruitment and retention of highly-qualified SLPs supported by SB 791 / HB 883 would allow students to receive timely speech therapy services rather than missing speech therapy due to lack of staff experience. Delays can result in increased time in special education and the need for more services over time, which is harmful to children and more expensive to Maryland.

Maryland now offers salary supplements of \$10,000 and \$17,000 to educators who hold National Board Teaching Certification (NBTC) through the Blueprint legislation.

SLPs participate in classroom activity involving direct interactions with students. We provide direct specialized instruction to students with disabilities and are solely responsible for Individualized Education Program (IEP) communication goals, however Pearson (the private company running the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards) does not have a category for SLPs in their NBTC standards, making us ineligible for salary supplements in the Blueprint.

SB 791 / HB 883 will allow for salary supplements to be "awarded to an educator for meeting high-quality standards on an assessment in a professional field or specialty that does not have NBC standards." Passage of these bills will impact educational outcomes for students who qualify for speech and language services.

SLPs are highly-qualified educators. They complete their course of study to obtain a Master's degree, spend 36 weeks of full time work under supervision as Clinical Fellows, and can then obtain the Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

On the website asha.org, the CCC is described as a nationally recognized professional credential that represents a level of excellence in the field of Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP). Those who have achieved the CCC—ASHA certification—have voluntarily met rigorous academic and professional standards, typically going beyond the minimum requirements for state licensure. They have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to provide high quality clinical services, and they actively engage in ongoing professional development to keep their certification current.

ASHA is the nation's leading professional, credentialing, and scientific organization for speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and speech/language/hearing scientists. ASHA initiated the development of national standards for the professions and has been certifying professionals since 1952.

ASHA's certification standards are based on skills validation studies and practice analyses involving employers, leaders in the discipline of communication sciences and disorders, and practitioners in the professions of speech-language pathology. ASHA certification is not contingent upon membership in any professional organization.

Maryland is offering salary supplements to teachers, including special educators, who achieve the NBTC credential. SB 791 / HB 883 would offer the same opportunity to SLPs who work in public schools and hold a comparable national certification (ASHA's CCC). These credentials are equally rigorous, both requiring a national examination and peer review of skill. Without SB 791 / HB 883, Maryland stands to lose money and human resources to meet the needs of children with communication disorders in our schools.

MSHA supports SB 791 / HB 883 as an important and necessary component of assuring the best educational outcomes for students in Maryland schools.

If you have questions, you or your staff may contact MSHA at 301-304-7001 or reach me on my personal cell at 301-456-4723 or via e-mail president@mdslha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Lee Casper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary L. Casper, MA, CCC-SLP, ASHA Fellow, FNAP

MSHA President

Maryland District 15 resident