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February 25, 2025

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **SB 919 Health Occupations - Practice Audiology - Definition**
Position: **SUPPORT**

Madam Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Committee Members,

Thank you for your overwhelming support¹ of SB 795² in 2024, which modernized and harmonized the practice of audiology Statute.

As a full-time practicing Doctor of Audiology in Howard County and a private practice, small business owner, I am here in full of support for SB 919. The clarification around health screenings and the need to include 'Third Party Payors' is essential to continue to modernize the definition of audiology.

Your leadership in passing SB 795 last year has made a real difference in the lives of Marylanders. In January, 2025, a patient presented to my practice with a chief complaint of decreased hearing acuity in one ear. After a comprehensive audiologic (hearing) evaluation, results suggested the patient may have a benign brain tumor (acoustic neuroma/vestibular schwannoma). However, further medical evaluation was necessary to diagnose or rule-out this pathology. A thorough discussion was completed with the patient about his options, including monitoring his hearing (and balance) issues, referral to his primary care physician (PCP), referral to an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) surgeon, or referral for a Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) procedure. The patient stated that he was not interested in seeing another provider without a diagnosis and opted to have the MRI ordered. Thanks to your passage of SB 795, I was able to refer him to directly to a radiology center without the need to wait for an intermediate physician's appointment to receive the same order for the MRI. The radiology report came back positive for an acoustic neuroma/vestibular schwannoma. I then directly connected with the patient's primary care physician to corroborate the referral plan. The patient was referred to the neuro-otologists (brain-ear specialty surgeon) at Johns Hopkins Hospital (JHH) for medical/surgical treatment. The entire process- the patient presenting to my practice until the appointment at JHH was completed in less than one month! Prior to passage of SB 795/HB464 in 2024, this process likely would have taken a few months, and given the patient's aversion to seeing another provider without a diagnosis, he may have dropped out of the system altogether.

¹ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/votes_comm/sb0795_fin.pdf

² <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Legislation/Details/SB0795/?ys=2024rs>

In May 2024, Governor Moore allowed HB 464/SB 795 to go into law without his signature or veto. In his letter to President Ferguson and Speaker Jones,³ Governor Moore mentioned the need to further clarify the modernized and harmonized legislative language. Health screenings seemed to be the major concern. The Maryland Academy of Audiology (MAA) has contacted and been in discussions with the medical society and ear, nose, and throat (ENT) society to further clarify the Statute, as Governor Moore suggested.

Health screenings are no- or minimal-cost procedures required of insurance payors and are often pass/refer criteria. As Dr. Briana Bruno Holtan, Audiologist, testified last year⁴, health screening machines are located in public shopping centers and allow your constituents to check their blood pressure, vision, and weight. Doctoral-level trained audiologists have obtained didactic and clinical education by virtue of their accredited degrees to administer the required federal, state, and third party payor health screening requirements.

After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree from Michigan State University, I attended Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. for my Doctor of Audiology (Au.D.) program. My fourth-year externship (residency) was completed at the Mayo Clinic Arizona. It was there that I saw the entire healthcare system worked efficiently to 'put the needs of the patients first.' Providers at Mayo Clinic do not have egos that need to be inflated by supervising or providing oversight of another provider. Each professional has their specialty, and everyone works together for the best outcome, not for individual income. Providers at the Mayo Clinic focus on the top of their scope of practice to best utilize the expertise of medicine.

Since SB 795 became effective on October 1, 2024 the Maryland Academy of Audiology (MAA) and national audiology associations have provided extensive didactic continuing education (CE) opportunities for audiologists to ensure they have the opportunity to work to the top of the scope of practice. My colleagues and I have (re)learned current standards specifically related to:

- Evaluate, Diagnose, Manage, and Treat Auditory (hearing) and Vestibular (balance) Conditions in the Human Ear,
- Conducting Health Screenings,
- Removal of Foreign Bodies and Cerumen (earwax) from the External Auditory (ear) Canal,
- Ordering Cultures and Bloodwork Testing related to Auditory and Vestibular Conditions in the Human Ear,
- Ordering and Performing of In-Office, Non-Radiographic Scanning or Imaging of the External Auditory Canal, and
- Ordering of Radiographic Images related to Auditory and Vestibular Conditions in the Human Ear.

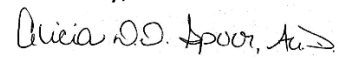
This is just one and only the beginning of the positive impacts of this piece of legislation. Removing accessibility and affordability for Marylanders at this time would be extremely harmful to their audiologic and vestibular healthcare.

³ https://governor.maryland.gov/Documents/HB%20464_SB%20795%20-%20Special%20Letter%20-%20Enact%20without%20Signature%20-%20Practice%20Audiology.pdf

⁴ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/cmte_testimony/2024/fin/1ez5S4npu4DJs7H1NrxJcxc4E1BWuy-pm.pdf

Thank you to Senator Gile for the ongoing support of audiologists and the patients we serve. I ask for a favorable report for SB 919 legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alicia D.D. Spoor, Au.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alicia D.D. Spoor, Au.D.
Maryland License #01145