



MARYLAND ACADEMY OF
AUDIOLOGY

Maryland Academy of Audiology

P.O. Box 710

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<https://maaudiology.org/>

The Honorable Chair Heather A. Bagnall
Health Committee
Lowe House Office Building
Room 240
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 09, 2026

RE: HB 504: State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech–Language Pathologists, and Music Therapists – Physician Members – Repeal

Position: **SUPPORT**

Madam Chair Bagnall and Committee Members,

The history behind HB 504 is extensive. In 2003, the Maryland Academy of Audiology (MAA) put forth legislation (SB 588- State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, and Speech-Language Pathologists – Membership) that would remove the two (2) ear, nose, and throat (ENT) physicians from the State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, and Speech-Language Pathologists (hereby referred to as the Board of Examiners). The House and Senate passed SB 588, but it was vetoed by Governor Ehrlich at the request of Senator Andy Harris. Governor Ehrlich's letter, dated May 21, 2003, outlined two main reasons for the veto:

1. Removing the 2 ENTs would reduce the multi-disciplinary perspective of the Board of Examiners.
2. The ENTs have supported an increased scope of practice for Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists.

A compromise was made, and the two ENT members became non-voting members for any scope of practice issues to expand or restrict the practice of Audiologists and/or to expand or restrict the scope of practice issues for Speech-Language Pathologists.¹

In 2021, legislation was passed to add Music Therapists to the Board of Examiners (HB0233/SB0082. When enacted in 2022, two (2) licensed Music Therapist were appointed to the Board of Examiners as full voting members. The addition of Music Therapists provides another multi-disciplinary perspective to the Board of Examiners related to expressive and receptive communication. Additionally, the Board of Examiners now has a continuum of educational backgrounds from clinical doctorates (Audiologists), master's degrees (Speech-Language Pathologists), bachelor's degrees (Music Therapists), and associates degrees (Hearing Aid Dispensers).

¹ <https://health.maryland.gov/boardsahs/Pages/boardreq.aspx>

With the new multi-disciplinary Board of Examiners, legislation was again introduced in 2022, HB 830² to remove the physicians from the Board of Examiners. Unfortunately, the legislation did not move beyond referral to the committee.

The support from ENTs related to an increased scope of practice for Audiologists (and Speech-Language Pathologists) is appreciated; however, the two (2) physician Board of Examiner members cannot vote on such matters currently, thereby rendering Governor Ehrlich's second concern moot. Furthermore, there have been no petitions from the ENT physicians through Statute or Regulations to restore full voting privileges.

The Board of Examiners does not seem to place value in the two (2) physician members either. In 2022, the Board of Examiners submitted legislation (HB 155³/SB 103⁴ – State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Music Therapists – Revisions) to update the Board professionals required to be in attendance for a quorum. The legislation specifically listed an Audiologist, Hearing Aid Dispenser, Speech-language Pathologist, and Music Therapist be present. The Board of Examiners themselves did **not** feel the physicians, or consumers, were important enough to include them for a quorum. This fact alone demonstrates that while the physicians could have drafted the legislation to be included in a quorum, their actions show apathy towards the Board of Examiners. In addition, no amendments to add physicians to the quorum requirements were offered during the House and/or Senate hearings, and both chambers passed a version of the legislation unanimously.

When HB 504 legislation is passed, it will align the Board of Examiners with the other 19 healthcare/medical Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Boards, including Acupuncture, Chiropractors, Dentists, Massage Therapists, Nursing, Optometry, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Psychology, Podiatric Medicine, Counselors and Therapists, and Social Work, none of which have any physician members (other than the Board of Physicians, of course).

According to the public Board of Examiners minutes from 2016-2025, there were no significant and/or educational contributions from the physicians at any time.⁵ During the 2021 legislative session, five (5) emergency sessions were called by the Board of Examiners. The most recent emergency Board of Examiners meeting in February did not have a physician present.

As noted during the 2024 Legislative Session during testimony for HB 464⁶/SB795⁷, the shortage of healthcare providers is dire. The physician members of the Board of Examiners should actively be caring for patients and participating in the Board of Physicians.

Maryland strives to be a leader in many areas, especially the profession of Audiology. However, the Board of Examiners is viewed in the bottom 10%, requiring not only one (1), but two (2) physicians on the Board of Examiners. Twenty-three (23) other states have no physicians on the licensing board, one (1) state has no licensing board. The extreme delay Maryland has experienced in updating their Board of Examiners members is embarrassing, when the state is advanced in so many other areas. The year 2003 was the appropriate occasion to make these changes, but now, 23 years later, is the time to correct this unnecessary anomaly.

² <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/bills/hb/hb0830F.pdf>

³ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/bills/hb/hb0155T.pdf>

⁴ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/bills/sb/sb0103T.pdf>

⁵ <https://health.maryland.gov/boardsahs/Pages/minutes.aspx>

⁶ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/bills/hb/hb0464T.pdf>

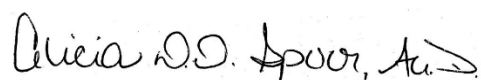
⁷ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/bills/sb/sb0795T.pdf>

While minimal, there is also a financial component to having two (2) physicians on the Board of Examiners. In 2003, the Fiscal Note showed a \$700 estimated savings; in 2022, the Fiscal Note showed a \$1,500.⁸ An additional \$1,500 of taxpayer dollars could be used for professional development, additional administrative staff, and/or outreach.

The MAA represents almost 600 licensed Audiologists who practice in the state of Maryland, and the patients they serve. The MAA's goal is to enhance the ability of members to achieve career and practice objectives by fostering professional autonomy, providing quality continuing education, and increasing public and consumer awareness of hearing and balance disorders and the value of audiologic services. By virtue of education and licensure, Audiologists are the most qualified professionals to manage hearing and balance disorders. An Audiologist is a state-licensed professional who specializes in evaluating, diagnosing, treating, and managing patients with hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance (vestibular) disorders. Audiologists work in a variety of settings: private practice offices, hospitals, medical centers, out-patient clinics, public and private schools, universities (teaching and research), regulatory agencies, large-scale research centers, rehabilitation centers, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, the Veterans Administration, and the U.S. Military. Audiologists work closely with federal, state, and private third-party payers to optimize coverage of services provided for the evaluation and treatment of the patients in their care.

HB 504 finally provides the updates to the Board of Examiner members, ensures a multi-disciplinary educational background and professional scope of Board members, and among other things, aligns the Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Music Therapists with the other Maryland Boards. Thank you for your support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

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

Alicia D.D. Spoor, Au.D.
Legislative Chair
Maryland Academy of Audiology

⁸ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2022RS/fnotes/bil_0000/hb0830.pdf
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Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 830 (Delegate R. Lewis)
 Health and Government Operations

State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Music Therapists - Physician Members - Repeal

This bill removes the two physician members of the State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Music Therapists. The terms of the two physician members currently serving on the board must terminate June 30, 2022. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Board special fund expenditures decrease by an estimated \$1,500 annually beginning in FY 2023. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SF Expenditure	(1,500)	(1,500)	(1,500)	(1,500)	(1,500)
Net Effect	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Generally, an individual must be licensed by the State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Music Therapists to provide hearing aid services, practice audiology, practice speech-language pathology, or practice music therapy in Maryland.

The board comprises 15 members: (1) three licensed audiologists; (2) three licensed speech-language pathologists; (3) two physicians; (4) two consumer members; (5) three licensed hearing aid dispensers; and (6) two music therapists.

The physician members must be voting members of the board, except on proposals that expand or restrict the practice of audiology or speech-language pathology. A physician member must be licensed in Maryland, hold a certificate of qualification from the American Board of Otolaryngology, and currently practice in the State. The physician members are appointed by the Governor, with the advice of the Secretary of Health, from a list of names submitted by the Maryland Society of Otolaryngology.

In accordance with the budget of the board, each board member is entitled to compensation and reimbursement for expenses at a rate determined by the board.

State Expenditures: Board special fund expenditures decrease by \$1,500 annually beginning in fiscal 2023. This estimate reflects a reduction in expenses for per diems for the two physician members. The board's current per diem rate is \$75, and the board has 10 meetings annually.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Health; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 22, 2022
fnu2/jc

Analysis by: Michael E. Sousane

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Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2003 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 588

(Senator Conway)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Health and Government Operations

**State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, and Speech-
Language Pathologists - Membership**

This bill reduces the membership of the State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, and Speech-Language Pathologists from 13 to 11 by eliminating the 2 physician members. The terms of office of the two physician board members who are in office as of September 30, 2003 will terminate on October 1, 2003.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Special fund expenditures would decrease by \$700 in FY 2004, increasing annually with inflation. No effect on special fund revenues.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, and Speech-Language Pathologists consists of 13 members: 3 licensed audiologists; 3 speech-language pathologists; 2 physicians who are licensed in the State and hold a qualification certificate from the American Board of Otolaryngology; 2 consumer members, 1 of whom is hearing impaired; and 3 licensed hearing aid dispensers. The Governor appoints the board members.

The board must meet at least once per year. Board members are compensated for each day on which the member is engaged in board duties and are reimbursed for travel expenses to attend meetings.

The board may not limit a State-licensed physician from treating ears or fitting hearing aids.

Background: The board holds ten meetings a year. On average, about ten board members attend each meeting.

State Fiscal Effect: The board's special fund expenditures could decrease by an estimated \$700 in fiscal 2004 to reflect the two fewer board members, \$500 less for per diem reimbursements to board members, and \$200 less for board members' mileage reimbursements. Special fund revenues would not be affected.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 205 (Delegate Hubbard – Health and Government Operations) is listed as a cross file although it is not identical.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 7, 2003
mld/jr Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 25, 2003
Revised - Enrolled Bill - April 10, 2003

Analysis by: Lisa A. Daigle

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