

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2309

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to regulation of hearing and speech professions.

Brief Description: Revising regulation of hearing and speech professions.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Health Care (originally sponsored by Representatives Dyer, Conway, Murray, D. Sommers, Dellwo, Cairnes, Ogden, Linville, Cody and Mason).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care: 1/18/96, 2/1/96 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/8/96, 97-0.

Senate Amended.

House Concurred.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Dyer, Chairman; Backlund, Vice Chairman; Hymes, Vice Chairman; Cody, Ranking Minority Member; Murray, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Crouse; Morris; Sherstad and H. Sommers.

Staff: John Welsh (786-7133).

Background: Hearing aid fitters/dispensers are regulated by the Department of Health, and a license is required in order to fit and dispense hearing aids to consumers in this state. The Board on Fitting and Dispensing of Hearing Aids governs the practice by establishing the minimum standards and procedures, guidelines on training, administering examinations for licensure, and acting as the disciplinary authority. The seven members of the board are appointed by the Governor and include two fitters/dispensers, two consumers, two audiologists, and a non-voting physician.

Hearing aid fitters/dispensers sell and fit hearing aids to consumers using nondiagnostic tests and procedures essential to performance.

Audiologists and speech pathologists, and audiologist assistants and speech pathologist assistants are not regulated or credentialed by the state.

Audiologists perform procedures relating to hearing, and related language and speech disorders. Speech pathologists perform procedures related to development and disorders that impede oral, pharyngeal, or laryngeal competencies and the normal process of human communication.

Summary of Bill: A state certification program for audiologists and speech-language pathologists is established, and audiologists and speech-language pathologists may be certified for practice. No person may represent himself or herself as a certified audiologist or certified speech-language pathologist in this state without being certified by the State Board of Hearing and Speech.

Certified audiologists may fit and dispense hearing instruments without obtaining licenses as hearing instrument fitters/dispensers.

Qualifications for certification as an audiologist or speech-pathologist include a minimum of a master's degree, as well as supervised clinical experience, postgraduate work, and successful completion of an examination. Speech-language pathologists and audiologists in current practice applying before July 1, 1997, may automatically be certified without examination. Audiologists not licensed as fitters/dispensers, graduating prior to January 1, 1993, who meet commonly accepted professional standards, may be granted a two-year temporary certification if applying before July 1, 1997.

Certification is renewable and may be placed on inactive status.

The board may also authorize interim permit holders to practice who otherwise qualify for certification, except for postgraduate experience and examination requirements. Interim permit holders must work under supervision.

Persons certified under this act are subject to the Uniform Disciplinary Act, and the board acts as the disciplinary authority.

The Board on Fitting and Dispensing of Hearing Aids becomes the Board of Hearing and Speech. The membership is appointed by the Governor and is expanded to nine members consisting of two hearing instrument fitters/dispensers, three consumers, two audiologists, and two speech-language pathologists, as well as the physician. The powers of the board are expanded to pass on qualifications of applicants; recommend continuing education requirements; and adopt rules relating to standards of care.

The hearing instrument fitters/dispensers practice act is modified in a number of particulars. The minimum age of applicants is raised from 18 to 21. Applicants must have at least six months of apprenticeship training. Permits may be issued for persons who are employees of a fitter/dispenser or audiologist, and must work under direct supervision.

Studies by the board are required on the utilization of audiologist and speech-language pathologist assistants, and on the merits of establishing a two-year entry level degree for fitters/dispensers with a report to the Legislature due by January 1, 1998.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Audiologists and speech-language pathologists have attained a recognized level of competence demonstrated through national certification, experience, and the attainment of higher educational qualifications. Requiring a master's degree for certification will identify those practitioners with higher standards of competence for better consumer choice, but will not restrict access to available practitioners by the public.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Steve Boruchowitz, Department of Health (pro); Susan Carpenter, Washington Speech & Hearing Association (pro); Nancy Alarcon, Washington Speech & Hearing Association (pro); Shirley Grillo, citizen (pro); Stacy Bates, citizen (pro); Sylva Kauffman, Washington Occupational Therapy Association & Medical Rehabilitation Coalition (pro); Margo Newell-Eggert, physician (pro); and Sharon Woods, Washington Hearing Aid Society (pro).