

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 2309

C 200 L 96

Synopsis as Enacted

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).

House Committee on Health Care
Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care
Senate Committee on Ways & Means

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

Hearing aid fitters/dispensers are regulated by the Department of Health, and a license is required before these practitioners may fit and dispense hearing aids to consumers in this state. The Board on Fitting and Dispensing of Hearing Aids governs this practice by establishing minimum standards and procedures, guidelines for training, examinations for licensure, and by 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.

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.

Audiologists and speech pathologists are not regulated and credentialed by the state.

Summary: The Board on Fitting and Dispensing of Hearing Aids is changed to 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, two speech-language pathologists, and a non-voting 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 such employees must work under direct supervision.

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 first obtaining licenses as hearing instrument fitters/dispensers.

Minimum qualifications for certification as an audiologist or speech-pathologist include receipt of a master's degree, 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, and 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 if they otherwise qualify for certification, except for meeting the 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 disciplinary authority of the board.

Studies on the topic of utilization of audiologist and speech-language pathologist assistants and on the merits of establishing a two-year entry level degree for fitters/dispensers must be conducted by the board. A report to the Legislature is due by January 1, 1998.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	97	0	
Senate	46	0	(Senate amended)
House	90	0	(House concurred)

Effective: June 6, 1996