

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2309

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 23, 1996
Ways & Means, February 26, 1996

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

Brief Description: Revising regulation of hearing and speech professions.

Sponsors: 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 & Long-Term Care: 2/22/96, 2/23/96 [DPA].
Ways & Means: 2/26/96 [DPA (HEA)].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Wojahn, Vice Chair; Deccio, Fairley, Franklin, Thibaudeau, Winsley and Wood.

Staff: Rhoda Jones (786-7198)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Health & Long-Term Care.

Signed by Senators Loveland, Vice Chair; Bauer, Cantu, Drew, Finkbeiner, Fraser, Hargrove, Johnson, Kohl, Long, Pelz, Roach, Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Strannigan, Sutherland, West, Winsley and Wojahn.

Staff: Susan Lucas (786-7711)

Background: Audiologists perform diagnostic procedures related to hearing, language and speech disorders. Speech pathologists diagnose and treat disorders that impede oral, pharyngeal, or laryngeal competencies and the normal process of human communication. There are approximately 2,000 speech/language pathologists audiologists practicing in the state. They are not presently state regulated. According to the National Association for Speech-Language Pathologists, 60 percent of these practitioners have received a nationally recognized credential, the Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC.)

Speech-language pathologists and audiologists practice in schools, medical clinics, hospitals, community agencies, and independently. In most institutional settings practitioners must meet accreditation standards of the facility or are required to receive some private credential.

Hearing aid fitter/dispensers fit and sell hearing aids to consumers using nondiagnostic tests and procedures. This profession is regulated by the Department of Health and a license is required in order to fit and dispense hearing aids to consumers. They have their own board which sets minimum practice standards, training guidelines, as well as administers exams and acts as the disciplinary authority.

Summary of Amended Bill: A voluntary state certification program for audiologists and speech-language pathologists is established. Certified audiologists may fit and dispense hearing instruments without obtaining licenses as hearing instrument fitters/dispensers.

Qualification 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, but they 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 of 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 one 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 ways. The minimum age of applicants is raised from 18 to 21. Applicants must have at least six months of apprenticeship. 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 fitter/dispensers with a report to the Legislature due by January 1, 1998.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: Technical changes are made.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 14, 1996.

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

Testimony For (Health & Long-Term Care): Certifying speech and hearing professionals will improve the standards of care.

Testimony Against (Health & Long-Term Care): None.

Testified (Health & Long-Term Care): PRO: Susan Carpenter, WSHA; Shirley Grillo; Nancy Alarcon, WSHA.

Testimony For (Ways & Means): The cost of the bill is supported by fees. No state money goes into the program. Forty-five states currently have similar regulations.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Testified (Ways & Means): Dee Spice, Dept. of Health; Jackie White, Speech and Hearing Assn.