

## PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT

RE: Legislative initiatives before the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States

The Pennsylvania Speech-Language-Hearing Association (PSHA) is a professional society of scientists, clinicians, teachers, and others who have common concerns and interests in the field of human communication disorders. The Association is affiliated with the American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA) and is recognized by the Legislative Council of ASHA as the official organization representing speech pathology and audiology in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

An important part of the society's mission is to assist members of PSHA to be knowledgeable advocates for federal legislative initiatives that are important to their professional practices. There are several initiatives before the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States that have the potential to significantly improve clinical practices for audiologists and speech language pathologists in the state of Pennsylvania. The purpose of this statement is to enumerate the position that PSHA takes with respect to each of those initiatives as they are currently written.

- **H.R. 1246 Early Hearing Detection Intervention Act of 2009**

PSHA strongly supports this initiative to reauthorize EHDI through this bill which has passed in the House and has been referred to the Senate. We urge Senator Robert Casey as a member of the Senate committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions to support this bill and work for its immediate passage. The total cost of passage of this bill is estimated to be \$2 per person, a trivial cost compared to the millions of dollars that are saved by early identification and intervention for infants born with significant hearing loss.

- **H.R. 1646 Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act**

- **S. 1019 Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act**

These bills are similar to bills introduced during every Congress since the 107<sup>th</sup> which seek to amend the IRS Code of 1986 to allow for a tax credit for the purchase of hearing aids. Currently, individuals who purchase hearing aids often pay over \$2500 per hearing aid but are entitled to no insurance benefits and no tax benefits to assist them in these purchases. Military personnel receive free hearing aids through the VA Healthcare system and individuals on Medicaid receive assistance for the provision of hearing aids, but individuals on Medicare or paying through private health insurance are entitled to no financial assistance. This bill seeks to "allow a nonrefundable income tax credit of up to \$500 for the purchase of a qualified hearing aid for an individual who is either: (1) age 55 or older; or (2) is claimed as a dependent of the taxpayer." The proposed legislation "denies such tax credit to any taxpayer whose modified adjusted gross income exceeds \$200,000."

PSHA supports these initiatives which are currently in the House Subcommittee on Ways and Means and the Senate Subcommittee on Finance. We thank House co-sponsors Jason Altmire, Kathleen Dahlkemper, Tim Murphy, Joe Sestak, Allyson

Schwartz, and Todd Russell Platts for their support and urge them to move the House version of the bill out of the Subcommittee on Ways and Means and bring it up for a vote in the House. We urge Allyson Schwartz as a member of the Subcommittee on Ways and Means to diligently work toward moving the bill out of the Subcommittee. We urge all other members from Pennsylvania serving in the House to lend their support to this initiative.

PSHA also supports the Senate version of the bill and urges Senators Robert Casey and Arlen Specter to speak with members of the Senate Subcommittee on Finance to move the bill out of the Subcommittee and bring it up for a vote in the Senate.

- **H.R. 43 Medicare Access to Rehabilitation Services Act of 2009**
- **S. 46 Medicare Access to Rehabilitation Services Act of 2009**

These bills propose to repeal the Medicare outpatient rehabilitation therapy caps that currently inhibit professionals from being able to deliver comprehensive rehabilitative care to many patients receiving Medicare assistance. Under current provisions, Medicare patients are arbitrarily limited to a specific number of therapy appointments, regardless of outcome. Speech language pathologists and audiologists who provide rehabilitative services recognize that benefits received by individual patients during therapy can vary tremendously from one patient to another. As dedicated providers of evidence-based services, audiologists and speech language pathologists must be allowed to determine when a patient has completed a sufficient number of rehabilitative appointments. This determination must be made on benefits, documented by clinical evidence, and not based on an arbitrary number of appointments.

PSHA supports these initiatives which are currently in the House Subcommittees on Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce and in the Senate Subcommittee on Finance. We thank House co-sponsors Jason Altmire, Robert Brady, Charles Dent, Michael Doyle, Jim Gerlach, Paul Kanjorski, Tim Murphy, Joseph Pitts, Todd Platts, Allyson Schwartz, William Shuster, and Glenn Thompson for their support and urge them to move the House version of the bill out of the Subcommittees and bring it up for a vote in the House. We urge Allyson Schwartz as a member of the Subcommittee on Ways and Means and Michael Doyle, Tim Murphy, and Joseph Pitts as members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Commerce to diligently work toward moving the bill out of the Subcommittees. We urge all other members from Pennsylvania serving in the House to lend their support to this initiative.

PSHA supports the Senate version of these initiatives which is currently in the Subcommittee on Finance. We thank Senators Robert Casey and Arlen Specter for their support as co-sponsors of the Senate version of the bill and urge them to help move the Senate version of the bill out of the Subcommittee on Finance and bring it up for a vote in the Senate.

- **H.R. 2068 Medicare Telehealth Enhancement Act of 2009**

Clinical service providers are often unable to reach many patients who reside in rural areas. For some of these patients, transportation to and from major medical centers in urban settings is extremely difficult, especially for the delivery of

rehabilitative services which may require appointments on a weekly or more frequent basis. This is especially true for older adults, many of whose health care needs are provided under Medicare. Telehealth procedures have been beneficial in reaching patients who might otherwise be unable to partake of clinical services provided by audiologists and speech language pathologists. PSHA encourages the expansion and delivery of telehealth practices across the state of Pennsylvania for the many patients in our state who may benefit from this type of service delivery model. Practitioners and researchers in the fields of audiology and speech language pathology must work together under federally funded grant initiatives to create standard models of telepractice and to document evidence of its benefits to patients. This legislation will help to make that possible for the residents of Pennsylvania.

PSHA supports this initiative which is currently in the House Subcommittees on Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means. PSHA thanks co-sponsors Charles Dent and Allyson Schwartz for this legislative initiative and urges them to move the bill out of the Subcommittees and bring it up for a vote in the House. We urge Allyson Schwartz as a member of the Subcommittee on Ways and Means and Michael Doyle, Tim Murphy, and Joseph Pitts as members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Commerce to diligently work toward moving the bill out of the Subcommittees. We urge all other members from Pennsylvania serving in the House to lend their support to this initiative.

- **H.R. 3024 Medicare Hearing Health Care Enhancement Act of 2009**

PSHA supports this bill in principle, but asks that it be revised before it is further considered by members of the House. The purpose of the bill is to give Medicare beneficiaries the right to direct access to an audiologist for hearing health care without having to first be seen by a primary care physician. PSHA seeks direct access to audiologists for Medicare recipients. Under the current bill, however, there is concern that the scope of practice for audiologists will be limited to diagnostic testing purposes only and will not include either rehabilitative services or diagnostic services related to the need for a hearing aid. This weakness in the current legislation must be appropriately addressed before this bill can move forward in the House.

PSHA thanks co-sponsors Jason Altmire and Allyson Schwartz for their support of this initiative and asks them to seek a revision of the bill to broaden the scope of practice for audiologists that it will cover. We urge them to ask that the bill be removed from consideration by the House Subcommittees on Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means as it is currently written and that they work to reintroduce the bill with appropriate modifications.

- **H.R. 4037 and S. 2740 Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act**

There is no mention of the important roles played by audiologists and speech language pathologists in the identification of weaknesses that can have a negative impact on a child's ability to read. PSHA strongly urges all members of Congress to consider including both audiologists and speech language pathologists as recognized providers of service under new federal comprehensive literacy legislation. As stated by ASHA, "these bills have been identified as the starting point for literacy provisions

related to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), however, they do not reflect the integral role that speech-language pathologists and audiologists play in improving language and literacy skills in children.” PSHA encourages all members to go to <http://takeaction.asha.org/asha2/home/> and follow the “take action” links to contact members of Congress about this very important issue.

PSHA thanks House bill co-sponsors Chaka Fatta and Joe Sestak for their support and encourages them to consider adding audiologists and speech language pathologists as providers of services related to literacy issues in children. PSHA also asks House members of the Subcommittee on Education and Labor Jason Altmire, Todd Platts, Joe Sestak, and Glenn Thompson to consider revising the House version of the bill to include audiologists and speech language pathologists as related service providers. PSHA also asks Senate member of the Subcommittee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Robert Casey to consider revising the Senate version of the bill to include audiologists and speech language pathologists as related service providers.