



**Written Testimony To
The Pennsylvania House Professional Licensure Committee
Regarding House Bill 1561 (PN2097)
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**Submitted by
Bradley R. Roller
Government Relations Specialist
Pennsylvania School Boards Association**

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) respectfully submits this written testimony to the House Professional Licensure Committee. On behalf of our members, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on House Bill 1561, which amends the Speech-Language and Hearing Licensure Act. School districts make every effort to provide all students with an equal opportunity for a great education regardless of their intellectual or physical capabilities. This legislation has the potential to have a significant impact on school districts if the language is not carefully drafted and weighed, and we offer the following feedback.

School districts are required to provide services to special needs students under an umbrella of federal and state mandates. Under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school districts must provide special education and other related services to ensure a free and appropriate education is available to all students. The definition of “related services” under IDEA expressly includes speech-language pathology and audiology services. Additionally, under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, school districts are required to provide aids and services to qualified handicapped students. In regards to state law, provisions of the Speech-Language and Hearing Licensure Act require licensure of any individual who practices or holds himself out as being able to practice as an audiologist, speech-language pathologist or teacher of the hearing impaired in Pennsylvania. For those addressing speech and hearing needs in a school setting, the Pennsylvania Department of Education also has instruction certificates for Special Education-Hearing Impaired and Special Education-Speech/Language Impaired.

PSBA’s legislative platform supports initiatives that provide the greatest possible flexibility in the ability of school boards to attract and maintain qualified personnel to provide the wide variety of services that students need. However, we are concerned that current language in House Bill 1561 has the potential to instead limit the already limited pool of candidates that school districts have available to them, and set up unnecessary barriers to the provision of services to students. For example, those individuals with a Special Education-Speech/Language Disabilities certification are currently permitted to teach without a corresponding license under the Speech-Language and Hearing Licensure Act. As written, House Bill 1561 removes this exemption, and will require all new hires by school districts to hold a valid school-based speech-language pathology license in addition to a PDE certification. Currently, individuals seeking to attain a PDE Special Education –

Speech/Language Disabilities certification must first complete a clearly articulated master's degree program in speech and language pathology or communication disorders. These programs provide candidates with competency in the fundamental concepts of speech and language instruction, allowing them to provide exceptional services to students in grades Pre-K-12.

According to PDE Certification and Staffing Policy Guidelines (CSPGs), which provide guidance to educators regarding the issuance of professional certificates, the grade level and content scope of certificate subject areas, and the appropriate certificate for staffing professional positions in public schools, individuals with a PDE Special Education – Speech/Language Disabilities certification are qualified to:

- teach all speech and language disabilities courses in grades Pre-K through 12;
- teach the following principles: language, articulation, fluency, voice, oral motor, phonological, alphabetic principle-phonics and social language disorders, and other appropriate principles;
- determine the educational effects of speech and language disorders on educational performance and to plan and manage assessment and intervention of student instruction; and
- provide school staff development services regarding their collegial studies/skills, may serve in the role of mentor or advisor, and may assist students in understanding the “reading” content area materials related to subject areas.

PSBA would maintain that for future school employees rendering speech/language impaired and hearing impaired services should only have either be required to be certified or licensed, not both. There is no need to duplicate efforts by requiring both a certification from PDE and a separate licensure under another body. We have seen no evidence, nor heard concerns from our members, that the certification is insufficient for preparing special education teachers for these challenges or that changes have been suggested to the existing certification to address any perceived shortcomings. Individuals should be required to obtain only one credential or set of qualifications to prepare them to fill any role in a school, so that the burdens of meeting separate additional requirements do not become barriers to the availability of employees who have otherwise been deemed qualified to serve in the school environment.

To reiterate, PSBA questions the intent of requiring individuals who are already certified by PDE to obtain an additional license from a different state entity, as one credential is sufficient for ensuring an individual is appropriately qualified to fill a role in a school setting. To that extent, we strongly encourage the Committee to maintain the exemption for those with a PDE certification, and to weigh very carefully the impact of House Bill 1561 on the availability of those individuals and the constraints those requirements will place on the number of available candidates and thus school board flexibility to meet student needs. Should the House Professional Licensure Committee decide to move forward with consideration of House Bill 1561, we would be happy to work with you to draft language to ensure this flexibility is preserved to the maximum extent possible. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.