

ADVOCATING FOR AUDIOLOGY: Forward We Go, One Ripple At A Time

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Advocating for Audiology Title Slide (Slide 1):

No associated audio included.

Greetings Advocates! (Slide 2):

Greetings advocates and welcome to advocating for audiology! My name is Joshua Huppert and I currently chair the Advocacy Committee for the Student Academy of Audiology.

The presentation you are about to view was designed to help you become more informed about current pieces of legislation involving and/or pertaining to audiology, whether or not the audiology community at large supports this legislation, and ultimately, what it would mean for the profession should those pieces of legislation pass into common law.

The presentation was also created to make advocacy more approachable for students. I encourage you to use the information provided within this presentation to gain the knowledge and confidence needed to discuss these issues on both the local and national levels.

So Why Should YOU Care About Advocacy (Slide 3):

So, why should YOU care about advocacy? Well, believe it or not, YOU are a voice for the profession of audiology and its future is dependant upon those actions we take now to educate and inform others. Through education, we can enlighten others and facilitate understanding, ultimately enhancing the value of the profession of audiology and the services we provide.

Your voice matters. One voice has the power to spark conversation in many and, we, as students, represent the future of this profession. If we don't stand up for the profession and speak on its behalf, who will?

Veterans Access To Hearing Health Act of 2015, etc. (Slide 4):

The first piece of legislation that I would like to inform you about actually consists of two different bills. The first of which, originally introduced by Representative Sean Duffy (WI), is the Veteran's Access to Hearing Health Act of 2015 and the second of which, originally introduced by Senator Jerry Morgan (KS), is the Veterans Hearing Aid Access and Assistance Act. Both would grant the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) the authority to hire hearing instrument specialists internally and to determine hearing instrument specialists' scope of practice to be within the program.

Does the American Academy of Audiology (“The Academy”) support this bill? No. Considering the complex nature of those hearing and balance conditions generally associated with the veteran population and the prefatory training that hearing instrument specialists undergo, these patients would be unable to receive the care they would need from these types of professionals. In fact, services provided to these patients under the proposed legislation would represent a compromise in the quality of hearing health care services currently rendered.

Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Act of 2015 (Slide 5):

The next piece of legislation that I would like to inform you about was originally introduced by Representatives Lois Capps (CA) and Bret Guthrie (KY) and is known as the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Act of 2015 or the EHDI Act of 2015. In order to ensure the continued success of existing EHDI programs, the current reauthorization of this legislation would make a number of key improvements to EDHI programs over the course of the next five years including expansions of the programs to include young children, clarifying roles of the Center for Disease Control and Health Resources and Services Administration, and improving access to appropriate follow-up and intervention when hearing loss is identified.

Does the Academy support this bill? Yes. Currently, upwards of 90% of newborns born in hospitals across the United States are screened for hearing loss, which is fantastic. However, those newborns that are referred onward for further, more in depth evaluations are not as consistently followed up upon and, in many cases, often “fall through the cracks.” This legislation would help to improve these follow-up procedures in an attempt to ensure that fewer children “fall through the cracks” so to speak. It too would help to better identify those newborns who may develop hearing loss later in life (say school age) due to genetic/hereditary conditions, as screening protocols would be utilized, potentially, throughout the earlier years of a child’s academic trajectory.

Hearing Aid Tax Credit (Slide 6):

Another piece of legislation that I would like to inform you about was introduced by Senators Dean Heller (NV) and Amy Klobuchar (MN) and is known as the Hearing Aid Tax Credit. The Hearing Aid Tax Credit would provide a tax credit up to \$500 per ear (\$1000 total for a binaural fit should that be appropriate) toward the purchase of a hearing aid(s), available once every five years. This tax credit would be available to all individuals with no restrictions based on age or income.

Does the Academy support this bill? Yes. Essentially, this would represent a positive first step towards improving access to hearing aid technology. Currently, only about 25% of those individuals who could benefit from amplification actually own hearing aids. This number, as we all know, is despicably low and for many, this barrier to hearing health care is due to finances. Hearing aids are expensive and if the government was to offer a tax credit that could help alleviate the cost of hearing

aids, perhaps we'd see this percentage of individuals who own hearing aids would dramatically increase.

Medicare Audiology Services Enhancement Act (Slide 7):

The final piece of legislation that I would like to inform you about was actually reintroduced by Representative Gus Bilirakis (FL) and is known as the Medicare Audiology Services Enhancement Act. This legislation would expand the services for which audiology can be reimbursed by Medicare, yet it also adds an unnecessary and unacceptable level of physician's oversight to an audiologist's ability to provide high quality hearing and balance care to our Nation's seniors.

Does the Academy support this bill? No. In passing this piece of legislation, we are only adding yet another layer of physician involvement for services that are ALREADY within an audiologist's scope of practice. This would only be a step in the wrong direction, especially considering where the profession has now come since the advent of the doctorate of audiology degree (AuD) in the early part of the 21st Century. As a profession, we are only interested in moving forward, not taking several steps backward.

Quick Reference for Legislation Discussed (Slide 8):

Whew! Talk about a legislation marathon, right? Just in case there are any snoozers out there, I thought it would be helpful to provide a sort of quick reference summary page regarding the legislation we discussed today. Below you'll find each piece of legislation mentioned, what that piece of legislation is proposing, and whether or not AAA supports that legislation. I encourage you and the members of your chapter to consider this as a "bare bones", "quick and dirty" reference sheet useful in helping the Academy educate others.

Be the Pebble, Make a Ripple, See the Change (Slide 9):

Unfortunately, we've come to the end of this presentation. I hope that you've found this presentation enlightening, helpful, useful, and maybe even inspiring. Advocacy can seem a bit intimidating, but at its most fundamental level, advocacy is simply just another word for education. That is, when we advocate for audiology, we are simply sharing knowledge with others so that they too can become better versed in what exactly it is that an audiologist does and furthermore, the services they provide to enhance an individual's quality of life. Believe it or not, each time you explain to someone what you're going to graduate school for you are actually advocating for the profession. That said, if you can explain what you do, you can advocate; it's that simple.

In closing this presentation, I ask you to take a moment to consider the effect a pebble has when thrown into a body of still water. A pebble, perhaps, isn't an entity many take all that much time to consider. I mean, honestly, it's a tiny rock. However, one tiny rock has the ability to create a series of ripples across a vast body of water. The ripples, as they propagate outward, gradually grow and expand in

size. It's amazing to me how such a tiny entity could disturb the quiet serenity of such a vast landscape.

Metaphorically speaking, you, as an advocate for audiology, are likened to this pebble and you, like this pebble are destined to professionally and tactfully disturb the serenity of the vast landscape that sits before you as a future audiologist. I challenge you to create ripples. Initially, the ripples might seem small and perhaps insignificant; however, as time passes, one ripple becomes two becomes three and so on and so forth until finally the entire landscape is abundant in ripples and that which was once serenely quiet is now a symphony of change for all to see.

Be the pebble, that is, use your voice,
Make a ripple, the result of your voice sparking conversation in many.
See the change. Observe the changed landscape before you. You helped to create this.

Ways YOU Can Be the Pebble (Slide 10):

Here are just a few ways that you and other members of your chapter can become pebbles and create ripples in your communities.

Resources to Help YOU Get Involved in Advocacy Efforts (Slide 11):

For additional information regarding advocacy and/or how to get involved in ongoing advocacy efforts, be sure to check out the following web sites. And remember, be pebble, make a ripple, see the change.