

April 24, 2025

In support for H 5557

Dear Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Kerri Cassino, I am a mom advocate. I am here to testify in support for H 5557.

I have personal reasons to support this bill...

I have a daughter who has an IEP and Non-Verbal Autism, separation anxiety and SIB (**Self Injurious Behavior**).

My daughter has spent over 8 years in and out, of psychiatric hospitals without any access to services, like speech.

One of my daughter's Inpatient stays, in Connecticut concluded an AAC device is imperative for her communication needs. My daughter worked with an SLP and an SLP-A in the State of Connecticut very successfully.

Having an SLP-A would mean that my daughter as well as others, would have more access to this vital service.

Pointing out...My daughter since the age of one, has been on waitlists for Speech and Language services.

Most importantly, having set credentials for an **SLP-A**, that meet a certain standard of care to be available to help in other treatment modalities.,

As an example, Early Intervention Services, HBTS, (home-based therapeutic service), PASS, (positive approach to students' success), public schools, private schools, and community learning centers.

As it stands, our neighboring states, Massachusetts and Connecticut have accredited SLP-A's.

Lastly, we have had an absentee workforce that includes, Speech Language Pathologist for over 20years in Rhode Island. This is the perfect opportunity allow SLP-A's.

The State of Rhode Island already allows for PTA's (**Physical Therapy Assistants**) and for COTA's (**Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants**)

Today, I help advocate, so other special needs parents do not have to experience the loss of this vital service.

I have had the opportunity to help, SPED parents, advocate for outside Speech as their public-school districts were not providing this service, that was part of an IEP; Due to hiring and retention reasons.

This also occurs in private schools, where SLP-A's are already providing services, with out a proper credential.

I urge the passage of bill H 5557 as speech and communication are essential.

Thank you for your time,

Kerri Cassino

Mom advocate, 10 Heritage Cir Johnston, 508.942.0561