

**Testimony of Patricia Iafrate Bellini, MS, CCC-SLP  
School-Based Speech-Language Pathologist  
Past President, Rhode Island Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
Chairperson, Board of Examiners for Speech Pathology and Audiology, Rhode Island  
Department of Health**

Chairpersons and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding House Bill 5557. I regret that I could not be present to deliver this testimony in person. In my career, I have had extensive experience in clinical practice, professional leadership and regulatory issues within the field of speech language pathology.

I am writing to express my support for the proposed changes outlined in H 5557, which pertain to the licensing and regulation of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs) in the state of Rhode Island.

My involvement with this issue dates back to the 1990s, when I was a part of the original team, who along with others at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) established the initial registration process for SLPAs. At that time, we adopted some of the strictest requirements in the nation, mandating that SLPAs complete at least 18 graduate-level credits in speech-language pathology and work under one-to-one supervision. Due to these stringent regulations, very few people were able to pursue work as SLPAs in the state. These measures, however, were put in place to safeguard the quality of care and to ensure that only individuals with a strong knowledge of communication disorders could work in support roles within our field.

In 2017, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) introduced a national certification program for SLPAs. This program established consistent standards for education, clinical training, and supervision ensuring that certified SLPAs would be able to provide high-quality services to individuals with communication needs as well as support speech-language pathologists.

House Bill 5557 proposes updates to our current regulations that will closely align Rhode Island with ASHA's framework. By updating our requirements, we can ensure that SLPAs are entering the workforce with appropriate training and clinical preparation.

I urge you to vote in favor of H 5557. This bill represents a critical step forward in ensuring that all Rhode Islanders have access to well-qualified and effectively supervised speech-language pathology assistants.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
**Patricia Iafrate Bellini, MS, CCC-SLP**