

Patricia Iafrate Bellini M.S. CCC/SLP
24 Forest View Drive
North Providence, Rhode Island 02904
pibellinisl@gmail.com

Testimony in support of HB 8219
May 9, 2024
House Committee on Health & Human Services

Thank you very much for allowing me to testify before you today. My name is Pattie Bellini. I have been a school-based speech language pathologist for over 40 years. I am the immediate Past President of the Rhode Island Speech and Hearing Association (RISHA). I sit on the Board of Examiners for Speech Language Pathology and Audiology at the Rhode Island Department of Health.

I'm here today in my capacity as Past President but also personally to speak in favor of HB 8219. This bill, if enacted, would allow the state of Rhode Island to enter into the Audiology and Speech Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC). There are already 30 states that are part of this Compact including most of the New England states.

As many of you know, as with other interstate compacts, this would allow people who are licensed in other states that are part of the compact to have a more streamlined, more cost efficient way to become licensed in the state of Rhode Island. There are many reasons why people hold licenses in more than one state, including the spouses of active military personnel, travel Speech Language Pathologists and those who provide telehealth services. Last year we passed legislation to make changes in the Rules and Regulations Regarding Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists through the Department of Health. One of the major changes was licensing for those providing telehealth. We are now requiring people who reside in other states and who are practicing in the state of Rhode Island via telehealth to be licensed in accordance with the high standards we have in our state. So anyone, no matter where they reside, who practice here, in any manner must be licensed here. By becoming part of the compact the process for licensing become easier for those in other compact states.

I will leave you with this...We are in need of speech language pathologists and audiologists in the state of Rhode Island. We have a huge shortage. Personally, I am contacted at least once a week from placement agencies regarding job availability. Our organization frequently receives employment requests for people who might be interested in full or part time work. I know of maternity leaves where there has been no coverage and not because people haven't tried to find someone, they have, believe me, there is no one there. We have to make it more appealing for people to want to work within our state. We have to make it easier for those who hold multiple state licenses to practice here. We have to make it more streamlined for those who are now required to hold license because they are providing telehealth services within our state. Being part of the compact will insure this and make Rhode Island and Rhode Islanders with communication disorders more accessible to the services they need. I respectfully ask for your support of this bill.