



March 16, 2018

Representative Tony Albright
367 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Required report for proposal of new license under Minn. Stat. 214.002 subd. 1

Dear Representative Albright,

The Minnesota Speech-Language-Hearing Association (MnSHA) was founded in 1936 and is a nonprofit professional organization of speech-language pathologists and audiologists that promotes the welfare of individuals with communication disorders and represents the professionals who serve them. MnSHA thanks you for your authorship of HF1122 - legislation that would establish a license for Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) Assistants.

Currently, Minnesota Statute 148.5192 defines the delegated duties, prohibited duties, supervision requirements, and guidelines for notification of clients that pertain to the practice of SLP Assistants. SLP Assistants provide services to remediate communication issues related to articulation, language, or voice impairment under the supervision of a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist. SLP Assistants are not currently licensed in Minnesota; however, licensure of SLP Assistants is mandated in 18 other states. Licensing of assistants already exists for other health professions in Minnesota, including licensing of Occupational Therapy Assistants through the Minnesota Department of Health (defined in Minnesota Statutes 148.6401 to 148.6450) and Physical Therapy Assistants through the Minnesota Board of Physical Therapy (defined in Minnesota Statutes 148.65 to 148.78). The proposed SLP Assistant license would not change any aspects of the professional training or practice previously stipulated in Minnesota Statute 148.5192. As a result, any individuals currently serving as SLP Assistants in Minnesota should be eligible for a license.

An online training program for SLP Assistants began in August, 2013 at Alexandria Technical and Community College (ATCC). Since its inception, ATCC has graduated 3 classes of SLPA's. Thirty students are currently enrolled in the AAS degree and Certificate programs. Prior to admission in the program, the students identified the setting in which they would be completing their required clinical practicum experience. All students secured clinical placements in educational settings near their homes in Minnesota and expressed an intention to reside in Minnesota upon graduation.

Considering the emergence of trained SLP Assistants in Minnesota in 2015, it is imperative that their practice be regulated via a professional license. Licensing protects those being served by professionals, as well as protects the scope of practice of the professionals themselves.

The clients working with SLP Assistants have varying communication impairments, and may range in age from birth to elderly adults. Because of their age or disability, individuals being served by SLP Assistants are potentially vulnerable. Therefore, licensing of SLP Assistants provides a safeguard to ensure that mandated standards of ethical practice are maintained, thereby protecting the clients' welfare. Licensing further ensures that individuals may not practice as SLP Assistants without adequate professional training.

According to Minnesota Statute 148.5192, either of the following educational requirements must be met to practice as a SLP Assistant:

- (1) an associate degree from a speech-language pathology assistant program (such as the one ATCC provides) that is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges or its equivalent as approved by the commissioner; or
- (2) a bachelor's degree in the discipline of communication sciences or disorders with additional transcript credit in the area of instruction in assistant-level service delivery practices and completion of at least 100 hours of supervised field work experience as a speech-language pathology assistant student (that ATCC also provides).

These requirements mirror those specified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) for SLP Assistants. Therefore, any SLP Assistant practicing in Minnesota or another state would be held to the same educational requirements. With the introduction of a SLP Assistant license, applicants would be required to provide evidence of proper training.

It is expected that licensing of SLP Assistants **would not** deter individuals from seeking this professional path. Nationally and within Minnesota, there is a **critical shortage** of licensed Speech-Language Pathologists. It is expected that the profession of SLP Assistants will expand to fill a high demand. Individuals with a bachelor's degree in speech-language pathology who do not seek a master's degree (the entry-level degree for a Speech-Language Pathologist) may choose to pursue a career as a SLP Assistant and may seek the training provided by the two semester online certificate program at ATCC or other online program. Furthermore, individuals who are interested in a future career as a speech-language pathologist may elect to work as a SLP Assistant prior to or in conjunction with pursuing a graduate degree.

SLP Assistants may work in either educational or health care settings and are trained for both work environments. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and ASHA, the majority of Speech-Language Pathologists are employed in educational settings. It is anticipated that the same will hold true for SLP Assistants.

Minnesota Statute 148.5192 defines the following duties of a SLP Assistant:

- (1) assist with speech language and hearing screenings;
- (2) implement documented treatment plans or protocols developed by the supervising speech-language pathologist;
- (3) document client performance;
- (4) assist with assessments of clients;
- (5) assist with preparing materials and scheduling activities as directed;
- (6) perform checks and maintenance of equipment;
- (7) support the supervising speech-language pathologist in research projects, in-service training, and public relations programs; and
- (8) collect data for quality improvement.

SLP Assistants are required to receive supervision under a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist. Minnesota Statute 148.5192 stipulates the following supervision requirements: (1) for the first 90 workdays, within a 40-hour work week, 30 percent of the work performed by the speech-language pathology assistant must be supervised and at least 20 percent of the work performed must be under direct supervision; and (2) for the work period after the initial 90-day period, within a 40-hour work week, 20 percent of the work performed must be supervised and at least ten percent of the work performed must be under direct supervision.

At the national level, SLP Assistants are eligible to become affiliates of ASHA. At the local level, MnSHA advocates for SLP Assistants at the state level. Our state organization currently offers membership to SLPAs as well. We anticipate that membership trends will increase as SLP Assistants become employed within Minnesota.

Within the SLP field, the pursuance of SLP Assistant licensure is accepted as a natural progression of the profession. Outside the SLP profession, administrators attempting to fill growing SLP vacancies are supportive of the advent of SLP Assistant licensure. For example, MSHA has the support of the Minnesota Administrators of Special Education to establish a SLP Assistant license. In rural areas of Minnesota with fewer licensed Speech-Language Pathologists, the hiring of a SLP Assistant would allow school districts to provide **much needed** speech-language services to children on Individualized Education Plans (IEP's). *It should be noted that the state of Minnesota already offers reimbursement to schools that employ an SLPA. This is through an EDRS code: Funding Source Code A, Personnel Type Code 59.*

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We are appreciative of your willingness to consider our proposed legislation, and we look forward to welcoming licensed SLP Assistants into our professional community. For questions or more information, please feel free to contact us at: office@msha.net or by phone at 855-727-2836.

Sincerely,



Melissa Lonsky
President, MnSHA