



Maryland Academy of Audiology

P.O. Box 710

Parkville, MD 21234

<http://maaudiology.org/>

February 16, 2021

Chair Paul Pinsky
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB379 Health Occupations—Licensure of Audiology Assistants

Position: **SUPPORT**

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

The Association of American Medical Colleges continues to project a shortage of tens of thousands of healthcare providers in the next 12 years.¹ The main factors that contribute to this shortage include aging patients, population growth, and a greater number of insured patients. Audiologists, by virtue of their specialty, often work with patients over the age of 65 years; this is the fastest group of population growth, according to the US Census.² Without “extenders,” audiologists will not be able to accommodate the growing demands in the hearing and balance healthcare system.

SB379/HB161- Licensure of Audiology Assistants will introduce Audiology Assistants to the Maryland healthcare system. Twenty-two other states have already passed Audiology Assistant legislation and at least five states, including Maryland, have legislation introduced during the 2021 Session. The legislation requires Audiology Assistants to have a high school diploma or equivalent, be of good moral character, demonstrate oral competency, and submit to a criminal history check. The Maryland Academy of Audiology (MAA) concurs with the amendments put forth by the Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers and Speech-Language Pathologist and **requests your favorable support.**

As extenders, Audiology Assistants will be tasked with completing routine care that does not require an 8-year clinical doctorate education, such as prepping an exam room and patient, completing screening protocols, and reviewing educational counseling of devices and accessories. With Audiology Assistants, Audiologists can focus on tasks that require their skills and knowledge: pediatric care, osseointegrated (e.g. cochlear implant) services, vestibular (balance) diagnosis and rehabilitation, and more. On-the-job

¹ <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/us-physician-shortage-growing>

² <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/10/snapshot-fast-growing-us-older-population.html>



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training will be outlined in the regulations and guarantee that Audiology Assistants can be employed without significant barriers to educational/training costs.

With Audiology Assistants, patients will have more access to hearing and balance healthcare. Rural areas of Maryland have few providers, and busy practices everywhere have waiting lists that can be three weeks or longer to obtain hearing and balance healthcare. With this new legislation, each licensed Audiologist can supervise up to two Audiology Assistants, ensuring support can be provided, as needed. Maryland presently has more than 450 licensed Audiologists and when HB161/SB379 is passed, a potential 900 jobs can be added to the state's economic development. This position would be ideal for those who are interested in pursuing healthcare or medical education, retired individuals who want to continue working part-time with patients, and those who do not want to work full-time (e.g. stay-home parent).

The MAA represents the 450+ licensed audiologists who practice in the state of Maryland, and the patients they serve. The MAA's goal is to enhance the ability of members to achieve career and practice objectives by fostering professional autonomy, providing quality continuing education, and increasing public and consumer awareness of hearing and balance disorders and the value of audiologic services. By virtue of education and licensure, Audiologists are the most qualified professionals to manage hearing and balance disorders. An Audiologist is a state-licensed professional who specializes in evaluating, diagnosing, treating, and managing patients with hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance (vestibular) disorders. Audiologists work in a variety of settings: private practice offices, hospitals, medical centers, out-patient clinics, public and private schools, universities (teaching and research), regulatory agencies, large-scale research centers, rehabilitation centers, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, the Veterans Administration, and the U.S. Military. Audiologists work closely with federal, state, and private third-party payers to optimize coverage of services provided for the evaluation and treatment of the patients in their care.

SB379/HB161 stimulates economic development, provides more access to hearing and balance healthcare, and allows Audiologist to most efficiently use their education and knowledge. Thank you for support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sofia Roller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sofia Roller, Au.D.

President, Maryland Academy of Audiology