



**ASHA**

American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

July 18, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services  
U.S. Senate  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Ranking Member, Committee on Armed  
Services  
U.S. Senate  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Chair Reed, and Ranking Member Wicker:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I write to share our position on the inclusion of certain provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 that would restrict access to gender-affirming care for servicemembers, dependents, and veterans, potentially including gender-affirming voice therapy provided by speech-language pathologists (SLPs). This includes amendments included in H.R. 2670, as well as those that may be offered when the Senate considers S. 2226.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 228,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; SLPs; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids. SLPs identify, assess, and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive-communication disorders.

Providing gender-affirming voice therapy is within the SLP's scope of practice and may be done independently or as part of an interprofessional team focused on providing services related to vocal health and communication. They can help patients safely modify their voice and communication behaviors—including verbal and nonverbal communication, such as vocal pitch, intonation, voice quality, resonance, fluency, articulation, pragmatics, and vocalization (e.g., laughing)—through evidence-based interventions and patient-focused functional goals.

Gender-affirming voice therapy does not require surgery (though the services SLPs provide can support recovery from some surgical procedures), medication, or other physical interventions, but rather, simply helps individuals with strategies, techniques, and exercises to more closely align with their gender identity or expression. Without proper guidance and treatment, modifying usual pitch, adopting new mouth shapes, or producing the voice in a different way than usual can be arduous and potentially damaging, leading to problems like vocal fatigue and dysphonia (altered vocal quality), vocal cord nodules, polyps, or scarring.

ASHA is concerned with efforts to inhibit patient access to gender-affirming care and attempts to specifically restrict the ability of SLPs to provide gender-affirming voice therapy. We believe that

all individuals, including those who are transgender and gender nonconforming and people with disabilities, have a right to bodily autonomy, self-determination, and equal access to health care.

ASHA opposed the inclusion of amendment #20, which the House adopted during consideration of H.R. 2670, which would prohibit access to certain gender-affirming care services for minor dependents who are enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program by virtue of a chronic condition, medical requirements, behavioral health concern, or qualification for special education. This would unequally restrict access to care for covered dependents with disabilities and could preclude access to gender-affirming voice therapy provided by SLPs.

This amendment and others with ambiguous legislative language about what constitutes a service, treatment, or procedure could impact the ability of SLPs to provide gender-affirming voice therapy to servicemembers, their dependents, and veterans, impairing their health and well-being and reducing troop morale and readiness.

As the Senate begins consideration of S. 2226, we urge you to oppose any amendments that could prevent gender-affirming voice therapy from being provided to servicemembers, dependents, and veterans.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eric Masten, ASHA's director of federal affairs, education, at [emasten@asha.org](mailto:emasten@asha.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Augustine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert M. Augustine, PhD, CCC-SLP  
2023 ASHA President