

To Members of the House Committee on Education: K-12 Subcommittee,

I am writing in support of HB 547 and school based speech-language pathologists.

- Speech-language pathologists provide services to students with disabilities such as Autism Spectrum disorders, developmental delays, emotional disabilities, intellectual disabilities, specific learning disabilities, sensory disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, traumatic brain injuries, voice disorders, ADHD, and speech-language impairments. Speech-language pathologists also provide support and services to students without disabilities, through prevention work and Virginia's Tiered Systems of Support.
- There has long been a shortage of Speech-Language Pathologists in Virginia and across the nation. Based on a fall 2021 survey of all school districts, there were 93 (full time equivalent) vacancies for Speech-Language Pathologists.
- Large caseloads may negatively impact both recruitment and retention of qualified speech-language pathologists. While three of the bordering areas do not have caps, West Virginia and North Carolina have a cap of 50. In reducing the caseload cap in Virginia, we would become more competitive for prospective speech-language pathologists near the West Virginia and North Carolina borders, as their cap is currently 18 students lower than Virginia's.
- The need for the reduction of the speech-language pathologists' caseload has been well established per discussion and action in 1989, 1994 and 2000 in the Virginia General Assembly. When the Virginia General Assembly reduced the caseload to 70, it included the intent of the General Assembly to reduce caseloads to a level equivalent to the national average by the year 1999. The current cap of 68 is well above the national average of 47.

By passing HB547, the VDOE will gather the data needed to identify the needs for SLPs in schools across the Commonwealth and create specific action plans targeting the recruitment and retention of SLPs.