

To Members of the House Education-Early Childhood/Innovation Sub-committee,

I am writing in support of HB2367. Last year, the bill was submitted as HB547. In conversations with the members of the committee that reviewed it, there was support and the decision was to lay it on the table and follow up with a letter to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), tasking them with completing the study and developing a strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs).

I was grateful for the support that was expressed for school based SLPs throughout the 2022 session. However, the letter was never written and therefore there has been no movement forward on the strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of SLPs.

As we are now on the other side of the pandemic, the need for recruiting and retaining SLPs is higher than ever. In the fall of 2022 a survey was sent out to the lead SLPs across Virginia. **47 districts responded.** Districts are employing the following professionals to provide the needed speech-language services to their students:

- 98% of districts employ full time SLP/school employees
- 49% of districts employ part time SLP/school employees
- 55% of districts contract SLPs (in person)
- 23% of districts contract SLPs (virtual-telehealth)
- 21% of districts employ SLPAs

Even with utilizing all of these options, in November 2022, only 25 of the 47 districts (53%) were fully staffed. Of the 22 districts (47%) not fully staffed, the number of openings ranges from .5 to over 5 full time SLP positions. Students in need of speech-language services are having their needs go unmet.

During the 2001-2002 school year, data was collected from all school districts in terms of the number of SLP positions and the number of openings they had. This data also allowed the team to look at the fiscal impact and how many more SLP positions would be needed across the commonwealth if the caseload cap were reduced. However, this data is over 20 years old.

Additionally, the need for the reduction of the speech-language pathologists' caseload has been well established in the Virginia General Assembly per discussion and action in 1989, 1994 and 2000. 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. Yet, the current cap of 68 is well above the national average of 47.

Our students and our schools are in need of qualified SLPs. In order to provide this, the VDOE needs to complete the study and develop a strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs), as outlined in this bill.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.