



Testimony presented by Susie Ternes, Au.D., CCC-A, Executive Director of the Kansas Speech-Language-Hearing Association to the Special Committee on Organization of Public Health Boards

December 14, 2016

Dear Chairman Hawkins and Members of the Committee,

I represent the Kansas Speech-Language-Hearing Association as its Executive Director and a practicing audiologist at Via Christi in Wichita. KSHA is a professional membership organization made up of about 1000 speech-language pathologists and audiologists. As you may know, audiologists are doctoral-level medical professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of hearing loss and balance disorders. Our scope of practice, as defined by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and State of Kansas law includes the fitting and dispensing of hearing aids.

Audiologists are licensed through KDADS, Kansas Department of Aging & Disability Services. The majority of audiologists practicing in the state of Kansas fit hearing aids. If an audiologist wants to do this kind of work, he/she must **also** hold a license from the Kansas Board of Hearing Aid Examiners (hearing aid dispensing license). To be clear, the KBHAE handles licensure for two groups of individuals: Audiologists who dispense hearing aids and Hearing Instrument Specialists (those who dispense hearing aids without an Audiology degree). As an audiologist who dispenses hearing aids, I personally hold both the Audiology license and the Hearing Aid Dispensing license.

KSHA understand this committee's desire to make government more efficient and less burdensome on the state budget. Additionally, agencies that oversee the licensure and credentialing of health care providers seek to provide the highest level of consumer protection. As such, KSHA would like to recommend that the Kansas Board of Hearing Aid Examiners, a freestanding board, be moved under KDADS. Reasons for this move are as follows:

- 1) **KDADS is an existing board that regulates most of the hearing and speech professionals in the state already.** This would eliminate unnecessary duplication of licensing boards. This seems a much simpler solution than trying to combine all of the boards currently being evaluated into three newly created sub-committees, which touches many statutes.

- 2) **Consumer protection.** At this time, when a consumer is fit with hearing aids and is not happy with the service provided, who he/she contact? KDADS to file a complaint against the audiologist? Or the Kansas Board of Hearing Aid Examiners? Audiologists are licensed by both boards in this state, which is very confusing to consumers. A consumer who wishes to file a complaint would encounter real challenges in figuring out who to contact. A Google search with the terms "How do I file a complaint against hearing aid dispenser in Kansas?" directs users to KDADS website (rather than KBHAE, which has no website) or to the incorrect contact information for the KBHAE (their previous Director's contact info in Wichita rather than the new Director, Zack Miller, in Garnett, KS). Additionally, I get phone calls at KSHA from the public, who find our contact number and try to file complaints with me for hearing aid dispensing issues. By moving the Board of Hearing Aid Dispensing under KDADS, it will be much easier for consumers to find the correct information and then to file a grievance. Since KDADS is fully staffed with full-time employees, complaints will be handled efficiently and promptly.
- 3) **Professional access.** I hear from KSHA members all the time that cannot seem to get information needed from the Board of Hearing Aid Examiners. I also get numerous phone calls from outside agencies asking me to verify whether an individual holds a current hearing aid license. I kindly direct them to the Board of Hearing Aid Examiners because I do not handle licensure, and they are always very grateful to be pointed in the right direction after having made countless phone calls and having spent several minutes searching the internet for how to verify a license. In contrast, KDADs has an online license verification tool that provides instantaneous information. This would be a welcome upgrade to licensees of the KBHAE, and to companies who would like to hire a hearing aid professional, but are delayed in doing so while trying to find out whether they are currently licensed.

In summary, KSHA supports the notion of streamlining the licensure of hearing aid professionals. The best way to do this would be to transfer the roles and responsibilities of the Kansas Board of Hearing Aid Examiners to an existing agency that is capable of (and already) doing this sort of work, the Kansas Department of Aging & Disability Services.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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