

## Co-existing With Music Therapists

Maryland association's advocacy keeps treatment of communication disorders out of the state's music therapy licensure act.

By Angela Mezzomo, Dawn Trotter

August 5, 2021



A bill to license music therapists in Maryland struck the wrong chord with the Maryland Speech-Language-Hearing Association (MSHA). After a four-year battle to prevent music

therapists from treating communication disorders, MSHA volunteers and lobbyists demonstrated to legislators that the state's own regulations were on their side.

Music therapists began their effort to seek state licensure in 2017. MSHA agreed that licensure was appropriate for music therapists, but we were determined to protect speech-language pathologists' scope of practice.

Although music therapy may affect communication, [it does not directly treat communication disorders](#)—and MSHA wanted to make sure music therapy licensure did not include treatment of communication disorders in the scope of practice. However, the music therapists did not agree.

## **A four-year journey**

MSHA met with the music therapists in 2017 to work out wording that met the needs of both groups. We expressed respect for their field and their desire to be licensed. But we also discussed our concern about music therapists directly treating communication disorders as opposed to providing music therapy to people who have a communication disorder.

From 2017 through the 2021 legislative session, we emailed the music therapists, sharing sample speech-language pathology course outlines (and compared it to their coursework), assessment tools, clinical placement and clinical fellowship requirements, and certification and licensure requirements for SLPs. We were hoping to demonstrate the discrepancy between speech-language pathology pre-service training and music therapy pre-service training as related to treating communication disorders.

Despite our efforts, the music therapists' proposed legislation in 2017 and in subsequent years allowed direct treatment of communication disorders. (ASHA has been working on the national level to have the American Music Therapy Association change the language of its model licensure bill.) The Maryland bill was introduced—but didn't pass—in four of the past five years.

During the 2021 legislative session, we achieved success when we brought language from the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) to the legislature. The bill was amended by the Senate Committee and passed the Maryland legislature with language from the code indicating that the term "communication disorder"—and other words or terms that connote professional proficiency in speech-language pathology—can be used only by licensed SLPs. The language also clarifies that music therapists cannot represent to the public that they are authorized to treat a communication disorder.

ASHA and the national music therapy organization have agreed to use this language as the model legislation in other states seeking music therapy licensure.

## **Steps to success**

Here are some advocacy tips based on our success with the music therapy licensure bill. These tips can apply to most all forms of legislative negotiation.

**Try to work with your opposition.** The MSHA public policy team met with the music therapists' group face-to-face in fall of 2017 to discuss concerns, and reached an impasse over the language related to treating communication disorders. Additional meetings, correspondence, and mediation all ended with no change in the bill language, forcing us to fight the bill every year and taking time away from our other initiatives.

**Know your key supporters and give them a task.** Don't try to do it all on your own. In our case, our key players included lobbyists (Davion Percy and Sarah Deveraj of Percy Public Affairs), MSHA and its members, other SLPs in the state, our ASHA state liaison, and state legislators. MSHA, the lobbyists, and ASHA staff participated in many licensing board meetings representing the views of the professions, as did ASHA President Lynn Williams.

**Build relationships with legislative members.** Get to know your representatives. Prior to COVID, MSHA hosted an annual Legislative Action Day. We went to legislators' offices in Annapolis to meet with as many legislators, aides, and support staff as possible.

**Educate your legislators.** Your legislators may have no experience with someone who has a communication or swallowing disorder or with an SLP. Many believe that SLPs just do articulation therapy. Explain what we do in plain language and tell them the stories of some of your clients. We created and distributed postcards with bulleted information about what we do and our contact information.

**Educate your lobbyists.** Make sure they understand the issue, why it is important, your desired outcome, where you can compromise, and any non-negotiables. Our lobbyists asked us questions, made sure they understood our position, offered alternate language, and offered mediation when things got rough between MSHA and the music therapists. We met with them weekly to discuss issues, concerns, progress, and next steps.

**Know your state regulations.** They could contain information about scope of practice or use of terminology. COMAR saved us. It lists 16 specific areas of professional proficiency—the first of which is communication disorders—that cannot be used by anyone other than a licensed SLP. Although MSHA had used this language previously, it was not readily accepted by the music therapists or their bill sponsor.

**Engage your members, licensed practitioners, families, related service providers**—all the stakeholders affected by the legislation. Urge them to contact their representatives with a letter, email, or phone call.

**Be thoughtful in your interactions.** It's OK to be passionate, but people stop listening when they are bombarded with negative comments.

**Leave messages.** We often want to speak to the person in charge, but remember that the person who answers the phone, email, or text is the gatekeeper. This person knows what is going on, can make sure your message is heard, and is likely to remember you.

It was a long and difficult path, but we got there. The music therapists will have licensure; consumers will know that SLPs treat communication disorders; SLPs know their voices were heard. We may have hit multiple dissonances along the way, but we think the result addresses all concerns.

**Angela Mezzomo, PhD, CCC-SLP, MHSA public policy co-director, is a clinician and member of the instructional access team for the Howard County (Maryland) Public School System. She is an affiliate of ASHA Special Interest Groups 12, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, and 16, School-Based Issues. [pubpolspeech@gmail.com](mailto:pubpolspeech@gmail.com)**

**Dawn Trotter, MS/Ed, CCC-SLP, MHSA public policy co-director, is a clinician and member of the instructional access team for the Howard County (Maryland) Public School System. [pubpolspeech@gmail.com](mailto:pubpolspeech@gmail.com)**

---

Regulatory, Legislative & Advocacy

ASHA News & Member Stories

Professional Issues & Training

---

## Additional Resources

### We recommend

State Spotlight: Iowa Speech-Language Hearing Association

Kelli Zeimetz-Mehmert et al., The ASHA Leader, 2013

Take Our Licensure Away? No Way!

Julie Y. Pratt, The ASHA Leader, 2013

Michigan Achieves Licensure for SLPs

Julie Pratt et al., The ASHA Leader, 2009

Minnesota Speech-Language-Hearing Association

The ASHA Leader, 2015

State of the States in 2008

Janet Deppe, The ASHA Leader, 2008

Nursing Practice Act

Annie Huynh et al., StatPearls, 2020

Louisiana Opens School Door for Opponents of Evolution

Fayana Richards, Science, 2008

Speech and language therapy within a forensic support service

Nicola McNamara, Journal of Intellectual Disabilities and Offending Behaviour, 2013

Speech Assessment

Yasmin Naqvi et al., StatPearls, 2020

Vivace Therapeutics Raises \$30M to Develop Cancer Drug Targeting Hippo-YAP Pathway

Precision Oncology News, 2020

ALSO ON ASHA LEADER LIVE

### Art Breaks to Ease Student Stress and ...

5 months ago • 1 comment

As is true across professions, the pandemic has posed ...

### Responding to Culturally ...

4 months ago • 1 comment

An offensive item spurs faculty members and clinical staff to address ...

### After Multiple ASHA Mem

6 months ago •

With hits to the care industry pandemic and

0 Comments ASHA Leader Live Privacy Policy Login 1

Recommend Tweet Share Sort by Best



Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS

Name

Be the first to comment.

Subscribe Add Disqus to your site [Add Disqus](#) [Add](#)



## TWITTER FEED

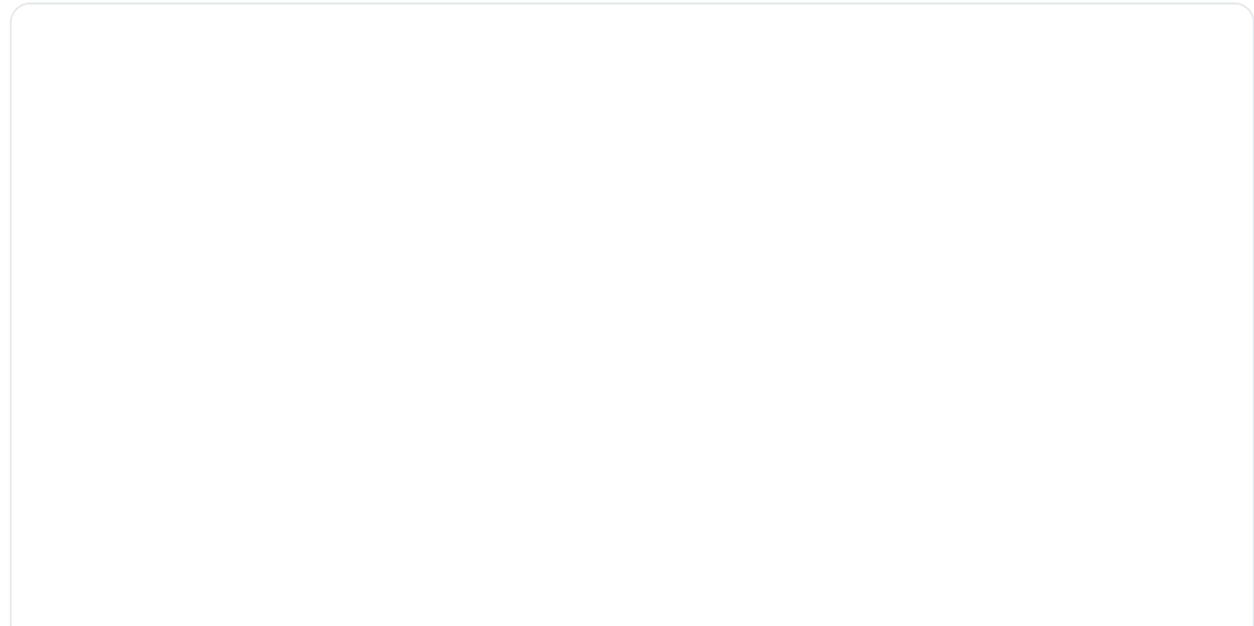
## Tweets by @ASHAleader



**The ASHA Leader**

@ASHAleader

“It really is a complex system that I think doesn't get the respect that it needs.” - @DionnaHearn discussing African American English on #ASHAVoices: [on.asha.org/37lah1V](https://on.asha.org/37lah1V) #slpeeps #slp2b #AAE @EastCarolina @AULiberalArts @meganbrette @ecu\_csdi



**ASHA Voices: Language and Identity—Shifting Away from a Deficit Perspective on African American...**  
AAE has its own rules and grammar, and it emerged from a long language tradition. But when AAE is not reco...  
[leader.pubs.asha.org](https://leader.pubs.asha.org)

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

## METRICS



Twitter (2)

Downloaded 148 times

## ASHA JOBS

Speech-Language Pathologist  
Wed, 28 Jul 2021

Clinical Assistant Professor of Speech-Language Pathology in Communication Sciences & Disorders

Thu, 08 Jul 2021

Program Director, MS in Communication Disorders

Wed, 18 Aug 2021