

2009 TSHA Legislative Update, February 4, 2009

As the 81st Texas Legislative session commences, the Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association realizes the importance of having an informed membership. TSHA wants to invite members to stay abreast of the latest news and updates by monitoring legislative activities that may affect speech-language pathologists and audiologists in the state of Texas. This year, TSHA has all the resources and information you need to become a well-informed member. Throughout this legislative session, TSHA's Legislative Leadership Team will provide you with weekly updates on news and happenings in the 81st Legislative Session that affect the professions of speech-language pathology and audiology.

2009 TSHA Legislative Initiatives:

The TSHA Legislative initiatives are bills that TSHA is introducing during this legislative session. The status of these bills will be monitored daily by the Legislative Leadership Team, and updates on the progress of each bill will be reported to the members of TSHA weekly. TSHA is supporting legislation that will:

- Ensure that speech-language pathologists and audiologists who are employed in the public schools will be included in the education code. This makes certain that any future pay raises and benefits awarded to teachers will also be awarded to speech-language pathologists and audiologists.
- Encourage professionals to seek employment in the public schools in Texas to help alleviate the existing and future shortages by providing loan repayment for any debts incurred as a result of their graduate education. This bill will also provide loan repayment for individuals who commit to earning a doctoral degree and then teach in a college or university in the state of Texas.
- Exempt from liability speech-language pathologists and audiologists who are volunteering professional services (e.g., at health fairs).
- Increase insurance benefits for consumers of speech-language pathology or audiology services.

Other items on the Legislative Agenda:

TSHA is also actively monitoring bills that may affect the professions of speech-language pathology and audiology in the state of Texas. As of January 31, 2009, this includes:

- HB 85 – Relating to the salary paid to certain professional employees of public schools
- HB 130/ SB 21– Relating to an enhanced quality full-day prekindergarten program provided by public schools in conjunction with community providers
- HB 160- Relating to the creation and administration of community-based at-risk youth programs
- HB 315 – Relating to the instruction of American Sign Language in public high schools
- HB 451 – Relating to health benefit plan coverage for autism spectrum disorder
- HB 461 – Relating to the regulation of dyslexia practitioners and therapists
- HB 594 – Relating to the licensing and regulation of hearing instrument fitters and dispensers
- SB 49 – Relating to certain requirements applicable to the State Center for Early Childhood Development
- SB 100 – Relating to professional development institute for public school teachers and paraprofessionals regarding education of students with disabilities
- SB 290 – Relating to the creation and implementation of the health professional education grant program
- SB 336 – Relating to closing state schools

Points of Interest:

The TSHA Legislative Points of Interest are current, previously presented, or proposed bills that may affect the professions of speech-language pathology and audiology in the state of Texas. It is important for TSHA to be aware of the status of these bills as they may affect the way we practice.

- Health Insurance Reform / Health Insurance Code of Conduct 2009 – Relating to increasing transparency and accountability in the way health insurance companies conduct business
- Children’s Health Insurance Program – Relating to increasing comprehensive health coverage for children.
- Medicaid Funding- Relating to increasing funding that supports healthcare for low-income Texans
- Teacher Pay Raises- Relating to increasing teacher salaries across the board that will bring teacher salaries to the national average.