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Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association Takes a Stand for Estimated Two Million Texans who Struggle with Speech, Language, or Hearing Disorders

During annual state meeting, six hundred TSHA members to visit legislators on April 2 to discuss key legislation in support of services and professions

Austin, TX (March 30, 2009) – The Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (TSHA) will host its annual state convention in Austin this year, April 2-4, 2009, at the Austin Convention Center. This year's convention will have a record attendance, with more than four thousand attendees from across the state.

→ **TSHA Legislative Agenda and Outreach**

Central to the meeting will be visits to the State Capitol – with about six hundred TSHA members visiting legislators on April 2 to take a stand on proposed legislation that will impact its members and the estimated two million Texans who struggle with some type of speech, language, or hearing disorder.

There are five pieces of proposed legislation directly affecting speech-language pathologists and audiologists and their services in schools, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and private practices to Texans with communicative disorders. They include:

- requirement of a pre-season cognitive-communicative assessment (primarily related to concussions) of all high school athletes engaged in contact sports;
- elimination of disparity and limitations within private health insurance that children and families experience when accessing speech, language, and hearing services;
- liability exemption for volunteering professional services;
- pay increases and benefits equal to those given teachers for work in public schools; and
- loan repayment for graduate education to encourage employment in Texas schools to help alleviate critical shortages.

See attachment for further details on proposed legislation and legislative sponsors.

→ ***Texans Talk...Personal Stories of Conquering Speech, Language, and Hearing Disorders***

Among information to be provided to legislators is a booklet published by TSHA – *Texans Talk...Personal Stories of Conquering Speech, Language, and Hearing Disorders*. It includes several personal and poignant stories, particularly about children, who have made great strides due to speech-language pathologists and/or audiologists identifying their problem and working to help them “conquer” the disorder. (Nearly one out of ten children has a noticeable speech disorder by the first grade.)

→ **Keynote Speaker – Robert Rummel-Hudson, author of *Schuyler's Monster: A Father's Journey with His Wordless Daughter***

The opening keynote speaker for the TSHA conference is Robert Rummel-Hudson, author of *Schuyler's Monster: A Father's Journey with His Wordless Daughter*. The book is a memoir of a parent dealing with a child's disability – a story of a family struggling to find the answers to a child's dilemma. But it is also a chronicle of a unique father-daughter relationship, formed without traditional language against the expectations of a doubting world. Ultimately, it is the tale of a little girl who silently teaches a man filled with self-doubt how to be the father she needs.

(More)

About TSHA

The Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association is a professional membership organization – more than 4,000 members strong – that is the recognized resource in Texas for speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and the citizens of Texas with communication disorders. Speech-language pathologists and audiologists provide critical, life-changing help for hundreds of thousands of Texans of all ages and from all walks of life. We help children and adults prevent or overcome a variety of communication disabilities – from speech and language disorders to reading and learning disorders, from hearing loss and balance disorders to autism and brain injuries. We use evidence-based therapeutic methods and tools to improve communication for children and adults in schools, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and private practices. On behalf of our members, the professions, and consumers, TSHA is committed to member communication, advocacy, and research.

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*** See Attachment: TSHA Legislative Overview – Bills and Sponsors ***

TEXAS SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION

***PROVIDING CRITICAL, LIFE-CHANGING CARE
FOR TEXANS WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS***

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR LIFE

**TEXAS SPEECH-HEARING-LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (TSHA)
LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW 2009**

- **PRE-SEASON COGNITIVE-COMMUNICATIVE ASSESSMENT OF ALL HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES ENGAGED IN CONTACT SPORTS**

Addresses the need for pre-season cognitive-communicative assessment of all high school athletes engaged in contact sports, in order to save lives and avoid brain injuries – using the same model which requires all athletes to have physicals before they are cleared to play.

Legislative Sponsor: Representative Eddie Lucio III, HB 4627

- **INSURANCE COVERAGE OF SPEECH, LANGUAGE, AND HEARING DISORDERS THROUGH PRIVATE INSURANCE**

Eliminates the disparity and limitations within private health insurance that children and families experience when accessing speech, language, and hearing services. Insurance benefits must cover all conditions regardless of cause and should not be left to the interpretation of insurance companies.

Legislative Sponsor: Representative Garnet Coleman (D-Houston), HB 2714

- **EXEMPTION FROM LIABILITY FOR SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS (SLPs) AND AUDIOLOGISTS WHO ARE VOLUNTEERING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

Licensed speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and assistants who voluntarily provide health care services should be exempt from liability as noted in the Civil Practice and Remedies Code.

Legislative Sponsors: Senator Troy Fraser (R-Horseshoe Bay), SB 1211
Representative Brian McCall (R-Plano), HB 1995

- **MINIMUM SALARY SCHEDULE INCLUSION FOR SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS AND AUDIOLOGISTS EMPLOYED IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and audiologists employed in the public schools should be awarded pay increases and benefits equal to those given teachers.

Legislative Sponsors: Senator Eliot Shapleigh (D-El Paso), SB 209
Representative Alma Allen (D-Houston), HB 3029

- **LOAN REPAYMENT FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION OF SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS AND AUDIOLOGISTS EMPLOYED IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND DOCTORAL FACULTY WHO TEACH IN A COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS (CSD) PROGRAM IN A TEXAS COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY**

Texas should help repay education loans to encourage SLPs and audiologists to seek employment in Texas schools to help alleviate critical shortages.

Legislative Sponsors: Senator Leticia Van De Putte (D-San Antonio), SB 1141
Representative Wayne Christian (R-Center), HB 3576