



77 South High Street • Suite 1659 • Columbus, Ohio 43215-6108
VOICE (614) 644-9046 • EMAIL gregg.thornton@shp.ohio.gov
WEBSITE www.shp.ohio.gov



TESTIMONY BEFORE
THE
HEALTH COMMITTEE
OHIO SENATE

THE HONORABLE STEPHEN A. HUFFMAN, CHAIR

APRIL 30, 2025

STATEHOUSE
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215

EXECUTIVE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FISCAL YEARS 2026-2027



INTRODUCTION:

Good afternoon, Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee. My name is Gregg Thornton, and I am the Executive Director for the Ohio Speech and Hearing Professionals Board. Thank you on behalf of the Ohio Speech and Hearing Professionals Board (SHP Board) for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony and address any questions you may have regarding the Executive Budget recommendations for FY2026-2027.

THE OHIO SPEECH AND HEARING PROFESSIONALS BOARD:

The mission of the SHP Board is to protect consumers by regulating the practice of three health-related professions: 1) audiology, 2) hearing aid dealing/fitting/dispensing, and 3) speech-language pathology by establishing, promoting, and enforcing practice standards and professional competency among licensees pursuant to Chapters 4744, 4747, and 4753 of the Ohio Revised Code and Ohio Administrative Code. The Board accomplishes this mission through a 9-member board composed of licensed professionals and public members and a staff of four full-time professionals all of whom are cross-trained. The Board establishes the requirements for minimal competency for entry into the professions. The hard-working practitioners in these three health-related occupations, which number approximately 11,000 professionals, serve consumers in all age groups and The SHP Board licenses speech-language pathologists, audiologists, hearing aid fitters, hearing aid dealers, trainee permit holders, aides, and conditional speech-language pathologists. These individuals work throughout the State of Ohio in a broad range of settings, such as community based/non-profit centers, home healthcare, governmental agencies, hospitals, private practice, rehabilitation facilities, retail, skilled nursing facilities, universities, and schools, which represents our largest work setting for speech-language pathologists. The licensees serve consumers in all age groups.

I would like to provide an overview about our 2 funded programs; first our licensure program:

The Board grants licenses to qualified individuals and oversees the administration of professional examinations, both administered through vendor partners and directly by the Board. When the public contacts our office, they receive assistance from professionally trained subject matter experts. We have 2 full-time, professional staff in our licensure program. They issue over 400 licenses expeditiously each year, and process over 10,000 license renewal applications every two years. Thanks to these dedicated team members, someone graduating from their program over the weekend will have their license issued within a few business days following their graduation date.

Next, our enforcement program:

The Board investigates violations of the laws and rules governing the three practices.

We employ 1 full-time investigator, who has nearly 20 years of experience. She holds basic and specialized certification as a certified investigator from the Council on Licensure, Enforcement,



and Regulation, is in the process of completing her certification on Forensic, Experiential, Trauma, and Interviewing, and is a member and former officer of the Ohio Investigator's Association.

The Board randomly audits up to 10% of practitioners for continuing education compliance, with approximately a 9% non-compliance rate, with appropriate disciplinary action.

We make appropriate referrals to the Ohio Attorney General's Office, federal agencies, and local prosecutors. For instance, within 24 hours, our investigator prepared a referral packet to a county prosecutor against an individual for unlicensed practice of hearing aid fitting against elderly victims, which resulted in the arrest, criminal prosecution, conviction, and incarceration of the perpetrator for unlicensed practice and fraud.

Our most common violations are for practicing under an expired license, misrepresentation of services, continuation education violations, and misleading advertisement. We typically receive 50-75 complaints, have between 100-125 pending investigations, and complete 60-100 investigations each year; more than half are internal referrals for licensure issues.

We follow disciplinary guidelines to ensure fair and consistent disciplinary actions. For the last biennium, the Board issued 102 educational letters, 13 consent agreements, and 1 adjudication order.

The Board takes appropriate action to address violations and ensure the public is protected.

To ensure licensees maintain and continue to develop their competency, the SHP Board enforces appropriate continuing education requirements. The SHP Board also investigates violations of the laws and rules governing the practices of speech-language pathology, audiology and hearing aid dealing and fitting and takes appropriate action to address the violation and ensure the public is protected. The Board is supported by a staff of four full-time employees, all of whom are cross-trained, fulfill essential public protection and customer service roles.

REVENUE GENERATION:

The SHP Board is a non-GRF funded agency and self-sustaining solely through licensure fees and has historically generated sufficient revenue. The SHP Board projects generating sufficient revenue to meet its expenditures and operate within the executive budget recommendations for FY2026 and FY2027. After board consolidation In 2018, the Board adopted rules that reduced and eliminated licensure fees for hearing aid dealers and fitters. For example, we eliminated the \$22.50 licensure fees for over 400 hearing aid dealer "satellite" locations across Ohio. This represented a savings of over \$65,000 since 2018 to hearing aid dealers who own the satellite offices. Additionally, we reduced the licensure application and renewal fees for hearing aid fitters and hearing aid dealers. The table below shows the application fees before and after 2018:



	Initial App Fee – Pre 2018	Renewal Fee – Pre 2018	Total Fee – Pre 2018
Hearing Aid Dealers	\$265	\$157 every year	\$422
HAD - Satellite	\$23.50 per location	\$23.50 per location	\$23.50 per location
Hearing Aid Fitters	\$265	\$157 every year	\$422

	Initial App Fee – Post 2018	Savings	Renewal Fee– After 2018	Savings
Hearing Aid Dealers	\$200	\$65.00	\$120 every 2 years	\$194
HAD - Satellite	0	\$23.50 per location	0	\$23.50 per location
Hearing Aid Fitters	\$265	N/A	\$120 every 2 years	\$194

I would also like to take a moment to address our other licensure fees. As previously mentioned, the SHP Board is a non-GRF funded agency. We are completely self-funded with reasonable licensure fees. There has been no increase in application fees for speech-language pathologists and audiologists since 1992. In fact, in 2006, the Board reduced the biennial license renewal fee for audiologists and speech-language pathologists from \$150 to \$100. Our licensure fees are well within and in most cases lower than the licensure fees compared to other states. for the five other states that share borders with Ohio. Additionally, unlike other licensure boards in other states, the Board does not charge fees for other services it provides licensees, such as replacement wall certificates, name changes, or sending license verification letters to other states. We consistently maintain a 98% customer satisfaction rating.

Since 2018, approximately 7.2 million dollars (\$7,275,510) has been saved by hearing aid dealers and hearing aid fitters and since 2006, approximately 2.9 million dollars has been saved by audiologists and speech-language pathologists through the reduction and abolishment of fees by the Board. Since 2006, approximately 2.9 million (\$2,910,000) has been saved by Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists when the licensure fee was permanently reduced. And for over thirty-one years our Conditional Speech-Language Pathologists have continued to only pay one licensure fee to receive two licenses. The first license is their conditional license. Once the conditional requirements are met, they transition into full licensure as a speech-language pathologist. Since 1992, there has been no separate application fee to transition into full speech-language pathology licensure, and many conditional speech-language pathologists do not have to renew their speech-language pathology license for nearly three years.



The SHP Board is fully committed to keeping our licensing costs low in Ohio.

BOARD EXPENDITURES:

The Executive Budget Recommendations for FY2026-2027 will meet the Board's critical mission operations. The Board's requested budget for FY2026 and FY2027 represent a half-percent decrease and 2.5 percent increase respectively of \$649,200 is a half-percent (0.5) decrease compared to the requested budget for FY2025. The Board's requested budget for FY2027 of \$665,400 is a 2.5 percent increase compared to the requested budget for FY2026. These variances are due to areas such as payroll in accordance with the collective bargaining agreements with the State of Ohio, administering our new hearing aid fitter practical exam, enhancements to eLicense Ohio for the data integration with our interstate compact. Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact's database system, called Compact Connect.

BOARD EFFICIENCIES:

The Board fully utilizes the back-office support functions and services provided by the Department of Administrative Service and Office of Budget and Management – Central Service Agency ("CSA"). By consolidating support services provided by the CSA, the SHP Board does not have to hire personnel to manage functions related to fiscal processing, information technology, human resources, or procurement. The SHP Board also shares access to the eLicense Ohio system with other regulatory boards to process and manage all aspects of licensure activities, including the processing of licensure applications, issuance of licenses, enforcement activities, and continuing education requirements. As a result of this leveraging, there has been no increase in the Board's staff since 1994.

THE AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY INTERSTATE COMPACT:

In 2021, Ohio became the fourteenth state to join the interstate compact. Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC). There are currently thirty-four states and one U.S. territory that have joined the compact ASLP-IC, which will allow licensed audiologists and speech-language pathologists to practice across state lines in those member states under a privilege. Eight states (Arizona, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania) have proposed legislation to adopt the ASLP-IC. Service delivery can be both in-person and virtually via telepractice. The ASLP-IC addresses a real need to streamline the application process, ensure continuity of patient/client care, while reducing regulatory barriers and excessive licensure fees for practitioners who practice in multiple states.

And finally, I would like to share information about our collaborative work with other agencies and stakeholders.



OUR COLLABORATION

We collaborate with all 12 graduate university programs in Ohio and speak with their students each year about the licensure process and also about ethical practice and professional issues. We collaborate with other occupational regulatory boards, and state agencies such as the Ohio Department of Health, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, the Ohio Department of Medicaid, and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. We are members of a national association of state regulatory boards for audiology and speech-language pathology and network with our counter-part regulatory boards from across the country to share best practices for consumer protection.

Regarding our collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, we have served on at least three ODEW statewide workgroups on issues such as workload for related service providers and shortages. These have resulted in initiatives such as the very successful OMNIE program, our Board's student permit program, and more recently the expansion of duties our support personnel can provide to our school-based audiologists and speech-language pathologists.

We served on the ODEW, Ohio Dyslexia Committee, which created statewide guidelines for serving children with dyslexia through the Ohio Dyslexia Guidebook.

We also collaborate with all 8 of the largest urban school districts in Ohio, State Support Teams, Educational Service Centers, Ohio's rural school districts, and last but certainly not least, the newly created ODEW Speech-Language Pathology Consultants to provide training, resources, and guidance on caseload management and ethical practice.

CONCLUSION:

I appreciate this opportunity to share information with you about the Board's mission, and how we strive to ensure that our mission is efficiently accomplished for all Ohioans. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.