PROMOTE WORKFORCE DIVERSITY IN AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

ISSUE BRIEF

ACTION REQUESTED

ISSUE: Current Workforce is not Representative of the U.S. Population

- Overall, 8.2% of ASHA members, nonmember certificate holders, international affiliates, and associates are members of a racial minority (compared with 27.6% of the U.S. population, according to the 2010 Census). Additionally, 5.3% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino, compared with 16.3% of the U.S. population.
- Of the individuals represented by ASHA, 6% have indicated that they meet the ASHA definition of a bilingual service provider.
- According to a U.S. Government Accountability Office study, a more diverse health care workforce—including a more diverse group of providers in training—is important because:
  - minority groups disproportionately live in areas with provider shortages;
  - patients who receive care from members of their own racial and ethnic background tend to have better outcomes; and
  - members of racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to practice in shortage areas.

SOLUTION: Cosponsor H.R. 3637/S. 2747, to Increase Opportunities to Support a More Diverse Workforce.

- Supporting individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in entering and completing educational programs will expand the growth of a diverse workforce in the professions of audiology and speech-language pathology.
- The Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act of 2019 (H.R. 3637/S. 2747)—modelled after the existing Increasing Nursing Workforce Diversity program (42 U.S. Code § 296m)—would authorize grants to increase the participation and retention of diverse students in programs that train and educate audiology, speech-language pathology, physical therapy, and occupational therapy professionals.
- The House already passed the Educating Medical Professionals and Optimizing Workforce Efficiency and Readiness (EMPOWER) for Health Act of 2019 (H.R. 2781), which included language from the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act of 2019 (H.R. 3637).
- The Senate should support passage of legislation to create the Allied Health Workforce Diversity program to ensure the makeup of the health care workforce in the U.S. evolves to mirror the makeup of the overall population. Having a more diverse workforce helps close the gap on provider shortages while improving the ability to effectively address the health care needs of all Americans.

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