

PENNSYLVANIA SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION

Keystater

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Letter from the President



The
Pennsylvania
Speech-
Language-
Hearing
Association

(PSHA) is entering an exciting new chapter. As many of you know, PSHA has officially transitioned to self-management. This decision allows us to significantly reduce costs while ensuring that your membership dollars are invested directly into advancing our mission and supporting you—our members.

One of the most exciting outcomes of this transition is the launch of new tools designed to strengthen professional growth and member engagement. This fall, PSHA is unveiling a new learning management system

that makes it easier than ever to access continuing education opportunities and track ASHA CEUs. This platform will give members the flexibility to learn on their own schedule while earning valuable credits toward professional development.

Equally exciting is the launch of our new member community platform. This space is designed for Pennsylvania SLPs, audiologists, and related professionals to connect, collaborate, and share resources. Whether you're seeking clinical insight, legislative updates, or simply a place to celebrate professional successes, this platform will provide a vibrant hub for engagement and support. PSHA's tradition of advocacy remains at the heart of what

we do. With our new systems in place, we are better positioned to amplify the voice of our members, ensuring that issues impacting our profession and the clients we serve remain a top priority.

Together, these changes represent not only a new way of doing business but also a renewed commitment to making PSHA a stronger, more connected, and more sustainable organization. I invite you to explore these new tools, share your feedback, and continue to be an active part of this exciting journey forward.

Sincerely,

Nicole Billak,

Ed.D., CCC-SLP/L
President, PSHA

2026 PSHA Convention

Experience a PSHA Convention like you never have before!

For the first time ever, the PSHA Convention will be held at the **Kalahari Convention & Resort** in the Poconos from **March 26-28, 2026**. This year's theme is Navigating Uncharted Waters. Change can be challenging, but it also brings discovery, innovation, and growth. As our field continues to evolve, PSHA is charting its own course. For the first time, we're steering the organization independently and gathering in a brand-new location to celebrate this fresh chapter. Together, we'll share ideas, strengthen connections, and navigate these uncharted waters—emerging stronger and ready for what's ahead.

The PSHA Convention Committee is thrilled to announce a fresh, reimagined experience for 2026, complete with new presentation formats, meaningful ways to recognize those driving progress in our field, and an unforgettable



setting that's as rejuvenating as it is fun. This year's venue, the **Kalahari Convention & Resort** in the Poconos, offers the perfect balance of learning and leisure, with world-class dining, a relaxing spa, fitness options, and one of the largest indoor waterparks in the country. Get ready to connect, celebrate, and make a splash as we navigate these uncharted waters together!

This year's Convention will introduce an exciting new session series—Consult & Collab—designed to spark clinical problem-solving and professional collaboration. Each interactive group session will be led by a topic expert and focus on real-world challenges across areas such as voice, stuttering, swallowing, traumatic brain

injury, clinical education, and more.

We're also seeking presenters for our 2025 Call for Presentations! Share your insights in a 30- or 60-minute session on the topic of your choice. Submissions are due November 15, 2025.

Not ready for a full presentation? Consider presenting a poster! A poster is a great way to showcase your work and engage with students and colleagues. Poster proposals are due February 11, 2026.

A sincere thank you to the Convention Planning Committee and PSHA Office for helping to plan a convention that is bound to make waves. We can't wait to see you at the **Kalahari Convention & Resort** March, 2026! Book your special room rate now! You don't want to miss it! Follow the link below to submit your proposal and book your room.

For additional convention details visit: www.psha.org.

Kalahari Resort

Proposal & Room Booking

Additional Details



STARs are audiologists and speech-language pathologists who are members of ASHA and advocate within their respective states for enhanced healthcare coverage and equitable reimbursement policies. Below are some updates from me, the Pennsylvania STAR.

Medicaid Update

The Pennsylvania Tri-Alliance Medicaid Task Force, made up of state and national PT, OT, and ST representatives, meets every other week. We were asked by Representative Lisa Borowski to help write the language for a bill she is proposing to protect access to care.

Private Insurance Update

The Pennsylvania Tri-Alliance Medicaid Task Force made up of state and national PT, OT, and ST representatives meets every other week. We are preparing for our next in-person meeting with Highmark/Helion on November 10, 2025.

Helpful ASHA Resources for Advocacy

Please find here a list of helpful ASHA websites for your reference. Links are attached to buttons below!

1. ASHA Take Action Campaign: <https://ashaa.quorum.us/campaign/medicaid25>
2. ASHA Headlines: Get ASHA Headlines in Your Email Inbox <https://www.asha.org/Publications/ASHA-Headlines/>
3. ASHA Advocacy News: Advocacy News <https://www.asha.org/news/advocacy-news/>
4. Call your legislators: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association | Call Your Legislator to Protect Access to Care for Medicaid Beneficiaries <https://ashaa.quorum.us/campaign/113562/>
5. Share your stories: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association | Share Your Medicaid Story <https://ashaa.quorum.us/campaign/113787/>

Best Regards,

Theresa Jacopetti

M.S., CCC-SLP
Present PSHA STAR

Submissions

Submissions of articles, manuscripts, reports and letters to the editor are encouraged. The Keystater also welcomes suggestions of editorial coverage. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit submissions for length and clarity. The statements and opinions contained in the articles of the Keystater are solely those of the individual authors and contributors and not of the Pennsylvania Speech-Language-Hearing Association. The appearance of advertisements in the newsletter is not a warranty, endorsement or approval of the products or of their safety. PSHA disclaims responsibility for any injury to persons or property resulting from any ideas or products referred to in the articles or advertisements.

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Advertising

The Keystater solicits and welcomes advertisements. Acceptance of advertising does not imply product endorsement by the PSHA Executive Board. Please click below to access more information about rates and submission process.

1: Take Action Campaign

2: ASHA Headlines

3: Advocacy News

4: Call your Legislators

5: Share your Stories

Government Relations Update

THANK YOU to our membership, our board and committee members for your engagement! From meeting with legislators to reviewing proposed legislation and providing feedback, your participation is the key to meaningful advocacy through PSHA.

THANK YOU to Angie Armbrust and the entire team at McNeesGR for your guidance and expertise!

HILL DAY UPDATES: PSHA completed a second Hill Day in Harrisburg in late June. Members of our caregiver advisory panel, PSHA members, and members of the tri-alliance, met with legislators to discuss medicaid reimbursement rates, the interstate compact and the impact of staffing shortages. We continue to work with members of the House Human Services Committee, Senate Health, Human Services Committee and House Education Committee on our legislative priorities.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ADVOCACY: We are trying to build the capacity and efficiency of our advocacy program. Last year saw the introduction of our

patient/caregiver advisory panel and this year, we are trying to develop a team of constituent liaisons, who will act as point persons for contacting state level legislators. If you are interested in learning more about this role, complete the form linked below.

TAKE ACTION FOR EARLY INTERVENTION: If you haven't contacted your state legislator about the impact of the budget impasse on early intervention services, please do so now. Click below to access a script and to look up contact information for your state representatives.

HARRISBURG UPDATES (courtesy of McNees GR): The 2025-2026 state budget is overdue by three months as partisan gridlock drags on. Lawmakers had a June 30 deadline to pass the 2025-2026 budget. But with September now over and the budget over 100 days late, school programs and county agencies that depend on state and federal pass-through money are in jeopardy. The deadlock between the Democratic-led House and the Republican-controlled Senate may soon force school districts and counties to borrow money to keep

programs running or reduce services. Some have already planned service cuts and hiring freezes starting in October. Pennsylvania is the only state in the country that has been unable to pass some form of a budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

RECENT LEGISLATION OF INTEREST AND ADVOCACY ACTIONS:

SB 802 Communication Impairment Designation on Driver's Licenses: letter of support sent June 2025
HB 1700 Helping Drivers with Communication Impairments: letter of support sent July 2025
HB 1670 Insurance Coverage of Hearing Aids: letter of support sent September 2025
HB 80 Authorizing Pennsylvania to Join the Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact: letter sent Feb 2025, passed House in July, awaits action in Senate.
HB 1701 Creating a School Facilities Inventory within the PA Department of Education Letter of support sent Sept 2025
HB 1828 Protecting Vaccine Access in PA: letter of support sent October 2025

Learn more at the link below!

[Be a PSHA Constituent Liason](#)

[Visit PSHA Take Action Website](#)

Hill Day & Avenues for Advocacy

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) organized a school-based Hill Day for the Mid-Atlantic states. Representatives from all Mid-Atlantic states convened to discuss and advocate for school-based SLP services. The lobbyist team from ASHA led the effort of organizing meetings and supported all attendees throughout the process. Participants met with state legislators to advocate for improved access to services for Mid-Atlantic residents with communication and swallowing challenges. Dr. MaryTherese (MT) Sabatino served as a representative for PSHA and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

First-year graduate students from Moravian University spoke with Dr. Sabatino about her experience at Hill Day. Dr. Sabatino has experience across many settings of the profession, including hospitals, schools, and private practice. When asked about her experience at Hill Day and with advocacy work, she shared what an impactful and meaningful day it was. While it can sometimes be difficult to approach these conversations with individuals who aren't as familiar with our field, she shared that one of the most meaningful parts of advocacy is making it personal. *"Begin with*



Dr. MT Sabatino in front of the Capitol Building at Hill Day 2025

have you ever heard of speech-language pathology or had a family member who received speech therapy? That's your in," she explained. *"What we are doing for a lot of people is life-changing, and we don't always appreciate the power that we have."* It was this approach that allowed her to elate to policy makers and **"have a voice"** in important discussions about manageable caseloads and quality of care.

Hill Day is an event that emphasises the importance of SLPs and audiologists ability to take pride within their profession and advocate for accessible care. Advocacy is something that should be key within everyone. Dr. Sabatino is a standing reminder that being an effective advocate can make you an effective clinician.

This means recognizing that *"you don't know what you don't know"*. Keeping an open mind and asking for feedback can allow for professionals to become introspective for further growth and improvement. Small interactions with continuous learning opportunities for growth as a clinician. Due to the ever-evolving field, keeping informed through reliable resources is imperative for continuing our personal education. An example of this would be through The Informed SLP or research from different institutions. Keeping curiosity and engagement strong will help to *"keep you moving forward"* and ensure stagnant practice is not in your future.

As graduate students, our interactions with Dr. Sabatino enhanced our understanding of advocacy efforts in the Capitol and highlighted the various advocacy venues available in CSD. It highlighted the importance of members' unified efforts to advocate for and make a change in the lives of individuals with communication disorders.

Best wishes,

Meghan Inglis, Lindsey Rapp & Soilymar Damon

Moravian University M.S. SLP '2027

Student Corner



My name is Jenna Nurick, and I am extremely lucky to serve as the Student

Representative to the PSHA Executive Board for the 2025-2026 term. I am currently a second-year graduate student at Drexel University, Elkins Park Campus. As a future speech-language pathologist, I have a broad range of interests and am open to any/all populations within the field. Right now, I am particularly drawn to working with adults who have experienced a stroke or traumatic brain injury.



While listed as the Alternate Student Representative, Ashley Dugas truly plays an integral role in the planning

and preparation for convention, while also managing the student social media accounts. She is currently a first-year graduate student at PennWest Edinboro. Her current interest remains undecided as she too is open to all opportunities. However, Ashley thinks she will find her future career in pediatrics.

Both Ashley and I are truly honored to represent speech-language pathology and audiology students throughout the Commonwealth, guided and inspired by the strong leadership of PSHA. As the frontline for student voices, it is our mission to create additional opportunities for students to grow both personally and professionally. Our main efforts are focused on creating positive change within our healthcare community and beyond. We aim to pursue initiatives focusing on mentorship and collaboration across the speech-language pathology and audiology student community. We would love for students to be active contributors in reaching our goals.

As students, we represent the future. It is crucial to voice our opinions to ensure our concerns are addressed. We must advocate for ourselves and the individuals we serve to create effective change. As representatives, we recognize the importance of student engagement and involvement as each of us brings our own talents, interests, and skills to healthcare professions. We are striving to improve areas

where students need support and/or change. We hope to create positive changes that benefit all students as well as programs throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

With our goals and mission in mind, we encourage you, students, to use your voice not only to better Pennsylvania's speech and hearing programs, but to share your ideas, thoughts, concerns, questions, etc., with us (jpn46@drexel.edu or ad203445@pennwest.edu)! We hope to hear from/see you engaging with our content via Instagram @pshastudents and TikTok @pshaweb to stay updated on the latest information pertaining to students. Please be on the lookout for student-specific convention information in the coming months.

Your words matter to us and the betterment of the Commonwealth. We could not do this without student-driven initiatives and a strong passion for these fields. Please do not hesitate to reach out as we welcome new ideas and perspectives.

Sincerely,

Jenna Nurick & Ashley Dugas

PSHA Student Representatives

Addressing the Special Education to Prison Pipeline Prior to Incarceration:

A School-Based Speech-Language Pathologist's Perspective



The special education-to-prison pipeline has been a taboo topic of advocacy and discussion within the area of special education, public schools and areas of specialty including speech-language pathology. The special education-to-prison pipeline was first recognized after the Ronald Reagan Administration declared its "War Against Drugs" in 1982, this declaration ignited fear, propaganda and increased the tolerance of racial and systemic oppression. The "tough on crime" rhetoric increasingly projected an image of being tough on crime and concerned with public safety, despite a disproportionate impact on communities of color. The administration's anti-drug public relations campaign was designed to exploit public fears by connecting drug use and crime with urban minorities. It can be perceived that such rhetoric is "strategically ambiguous" to implicitly blame Black and

Hispanic communities for drug-related problems. The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act also included the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. This promoted "zero-tolerance" policies in schools, leading to stricter disciplinary actions and increased referrals of students especially minority students into the criminal justice system. These were the first recognized events of both racial and systemic trauma related to the special education to prison pipeline.

Prior social conventions and stereotypes form general ideas of what "trauma" looks like in a school setting. When viewing trauma from a stereotypical lens, a child with trauma is depicted as evidently poverty-stricken, feral, unkempt and exhibits withdrawn demeanour which is not always similar to the trauma we see in everyday children. Trauma can begin as early as 3 months of age (Melville, 2017) and children who typically face trauma experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). ACEs can be identified as loss of a loved one, domestic or

community violence, inhibited or poor mental health status of caretakers, family substance abuse or incarcerated parent(s). Approximately 45% of children in the United States have experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), with significant disparities based on race and ethnicity. Black and Hispanic children experience ACEs at higher rates (61% and 51%, respectively) than White children (40%) and Asian children (23%). These experiences, such as emotional neglect, physical abuse, or parental separation, can have long-lasting impacts on health and well-being (Xang & Monnat, 2021).

With our historical recollection of the prior events during the Ronald Reagan Administration and discussion of depiction of trauma, we may assume that consequence models and "zero tolerance" policies provide structure and teach students in schools about rules and boundaries that would decrease behaviors. But if so, why do we continue to see an increase in incarceration rates and

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disabilities within the prison population? How can we address this as school-based speech-language pathologists? How does this correlate with speech and language deficits? Let's review our current statistics between communication disorders and the prison population:

- *At least one in every three youth arrested in the U.S. has a disability.*
- *Black children in the U.S. are nearly five times as likely to be confined as their white peers*
- *About 90% of young people who have committed infractions have some kind of language disorder, compared to 7.5% of the general population.* (Bryan, 2004; Stetlar, 2013)

Misdiagnosis of behavior in children in special education occurs when a child's symptoms are wrongly attributed to a disorder, leading to inappropriate interventions and potential harm. This can stem from complex presentations of symptoms, biases, diagnostic ambiguity, or issues with testing, leading to placement in inappropriate educational settings. Black children are often disproportionately identified in special education with behavioral

or intellectual disabilities, rather than learning disabilities like dyslexia or complex communication needs under speech-language impairment, which can lead to misdiagnosis, limited resources for treatment and fewer opportunities. This over-identification may stem from racial bias, leading to misinterpretations of culturally-influenced behaviors and learning styles, and ultimately tracking Black students into less rigorous educational pathways. While some Black students may be misidentified, others with conditions like dyslexia may be overlooked, leading to a dual problem of over and under identification within special education services.

Trauma can have a profound impact on expressive, receptive, pragmatic language and executive functioning. Trauma deters growth and stunts development in portions of the brain that students use daily to engage in academic learning and communication. Prior studies indicate the following portions are affected: the hippocampus, corpus callosum, mid-brain and pre-frontal cortex (Haritopoulos, 2022). These are areas of the brain

that control memory, higher-order cognitive processes such as language processing, problem-solving, sensory integration, making informed decisions and expression of personality and fear/aggression. This can lead to trauma manifesting as inappropriate social behaviors, difficulty with following directives, difficulty comprehending language/social cues and aggressive or defiant tendencies when given an academic or direct demand.

With our recognition of the prevalence and impact of trauma on cognitive function, language, regulation and academic performance, here are strategies to make our practice more aligned with trauma-informed care:

1. *Understanding trauma: recognizing trauma responses and being conscious of preventing retraumatization,*
2. *Creating a safe environment,*
3. *Collaborating with team members,*
4. *Using a strengths-based approach,*
5. *Obtaining a comprehensive case history to guide decisions*
6. *Including the student in choices.* (Yi, 2025)

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The role of the SLP and trauma informed practices are not aimed to “heal” or provide emotional therapeutic care, but are to express the relationships between language and trauma as well as provide preventative strategies and advocacy during speech-language treatments to decrease the language deficits caused by trauma and its impact on the student’s cognitive function. By applying trauma informed practices to our profession, we are able to assist in dismantling the special education to prison pipeline.

Table 1. A Tool-Kit for SLPs:

Strategy	Principle	Example
Recognize Trauma: being able to identify triggers of the student during sessions to reduce retraumatization.	The SLP will avoid potential triggers and prepare students for appropriate de-escalation.	- Student A may not enjoy adults in close proximity due to history of abuse and requires physical boundaries to be respected and maintained.
Model Safety: providing a safe space emotionally and physically for the students to engage in rapport building, trust and .	The SLP will model safe behaviors with consistency and reliability. Spaces are created to avoid triggers and provide consistent routines during therapy.	- Student A has difficulty with change in routine due to constant placement disruption in foster care and requires adaptations to be verbally informed and shown prior to entry to the therapy setting.
Collaboration: working with other team members to ensure all are informed of the history of prior trauma and potential triggers to reduce retraumatization.	The SLP will communicate with all necessary members of the IEP or Care Team regarding progress, behavior and additional information.	The SLP communicates goals of the student to family members and team members. The SLP collaborates with the school social worker to tackle difficulties with pragmatic language and appropriate play behaviors.
Strength Based Approach: using the student’s strengths to engage in activities and presuming the best outcome.	The SLP will collect data on students strengths/weaknesses to incorporate during therapy.	-Student A has difficulty maintaining attention in academic tasks, but expresses how they are proud of how they woke up this morning after helping parents with their younger siblings at night despite not wanting to be in school. The SLP comments on the student’s adversity, commitment and motivation to encourage positive outcomes in therapy.
Intensive Case History: including trauma, cultural and socioeconomic factors.	The SLP will collect case history and referrals including trauma, cultural and socioeconomic factors.	-Student A transferred to a new school with a vague speech-only IEP. The SLP notes behaviors and reaches out to the family to address behaviors. With the updated case history ... continued

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		the SLP is able to reach out to outside resources to provide the family with emotional support within the school district and referral to the school social worker to address trauma.
Including Student in Choices: seeking student input and feedback to appropriately incorporate student opinions in therapy sessions.	The SLP will allow students to express their opinions on therapy and delivery of service to increase autonomy.	-Student A refuses to enter the SLPs room. The SLP reaches out to Student A to inquire why the room is not suitable. Student A reports feeling unsafe with the room having no windows or natural lighting due to prior abuse history of being locked in a closet by previous caregivers. The SLP uses this information and holds Student A's sessions in a room where the student can have a view of windows/doors.
Permission to Fail: Modeling failure and acceptance of mistakes.	The SLP will encourage students to try their best despite the risk of failure while modeling appropriate behaviors and responses to failure and/or mistakes.	-Student A has 0% accuracy across all trials in all of the speech sessions due to lack of participation. What looks like refusal, the SLP can gauge that Student A is afraid to try. By modeling failure through Auditory Discrimination, the SLP intentionally makes mistakes during the Articulation session, asking Student A to "be the teacher and correct" them. The SLP increases comfort with the idea of making mistakes, creates open dialogue for failure and models appropriate teacher/student relationships and responses to failure and/or mistakes.

(Yi, 2025)

As you read this article, you may recall students you have currently or had in the past that fit the criteria of underlying trauma. These strategies are able to be applied to a wide variety of therapeutic settings and practices. Trauma has a diverse spectrum as it may present as a student with intense behavioral needs, a student who is recluse to themselves or a student who is in all honors courses with no external manifestation of trauma but internally processes trauma through academic validation and perception of inability to fail. Trauma itself is complex and as speech-language pathologists are roles are to educate, advocate and support children with complex needs in areas of communication as well as to support our allied health professionals with ways to address and prevent students from unintentionally becoming part of the special education to prison pipeline.



Scan here for references!



Written by,

Reagan Neterer

M.S. CCC-SLP

Slogan Contest & Thank You



A chance to win Emerald VIP Lounge Check-in for the 2026 PSHA Convention!

It is time to start thinking about National Speech-Language-Hearing Month (NSLHM) for 2026 and we need your help! PSHA sponsors a coloring, drawing, and essay contest for school-age students across the Commonwealth. Each year, the entries are based on a member-submitted slogan. We suggest that the Convention and NSLHM slogan are similar or connected. The theme for the 2026 Convention is Navigating

Uncharted Waters. Please send your NSLHM slogan ideas to VPPublicInfo@psha.org. The slogan contest winner will receive a complimentary upgrade to Emerald VIP Lounge Check-in to add to their convention hotel booking. This package includes a welcome treats and surprises upon arrival, personalized check-in, daily access to concierge-level service, and more!

*To receive the prize, the winner will need to register for the convention

Dana Bitetti

Ph.D., CCC-SLP
VP for Public Information and Professional Communication

Thank You to Craven Management

The PSHA e-board would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Craven Management for their dedicated support and partnership over the past 20 years. Your service has been instrumental to PSHA's operations and events. A special thank you to Amy Caye, Account Manager, and Diane Yenerall, Owner of Craven Management, for your exceptional professionalism, responsiveness, and unwavering commitment to PSHA and its members. We are truly grateful for all that you do!

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