

Audiology Advocate

March 2026

Every year, legislative and regulatory developments at both the federal and state levels affect audiology and hearing-health care. This quarterly newsletter provides a concise overview of key updates and issues you need to know, along with upcoming events of interest.

Federal Updates

Government Shutdown Ends with Key Wins for Hearing Health

In early February, Congress passed a funding agreement to end the government shutdown, which includes important provisions that strengthen hearing healthcare and improve patient access to services. Notably, the legislation provides \$18.18 million for Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) programs, representing a \$1 million increase over fiscal year 2025 funding levels. The bill also includes pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) reform aimed at increasing transparency and reducing healthcare costs.

EHDI programs play a critical role in ensuring newborns and young children receive timely hearing screenings, diagnostic services, and early intervention. Early identification of hearing loss is essential in supporting speech, language, and social development. Strong federal investment helps states maintain tracking systems, improve follow-up care, and expand services in underserved communities.

The funding increase reflects continued bipartisan recognition of the importance of early hearing healthcare. In addition to public health investments, the legislation advances PBM reform measures to address concerns about drug pricing practices and the lack of transparency within the prescription drug supply chain. These provisions aim to enhance oversight, eliminate spread pricing practices, and provide greater clarity on medication costs for patients and healthcare providers. For individuals with hearing and balance disorders who rely on prescription medications, these reforms may help improve affordability and access to necessary treatments.

The Academy is thrilled by the increased investment in EHDI, and efforts to improve healthcare affordability represent meaningful progress for patients, families, and hearing healthcare providers.

The Academy Advocates to Protect Federal Loan Access for Audiology Students

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Education's Advisory Committee proposed regulations implementing the higher education provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill. Among the most consequential changes is a revised definition of what constitutes a "professional degree program", a shift that could dramatically limit federal borrowing for student audiologists beginning as early as July 2026.

Under the draft rule, only students enrolled in one of 11 specifically designated professional degree programs would have access to the higher federal loan limits traditionally available to students in the health professions. These students could borrow up to \$50,000 per year for a maximum of four years, totaling \$200,000. All other graduate students, including student audiologists, would be limited to \$20,500 per year, with a maximum lifetime cap of \$100,000. For a clinical doctoral program that requires extensive coursework and supervised clinical experiences, this represents a significant financial barrier and a substantial departure from long-standing federal policy.

Audiology still clearly meets the Higher Education Act's definition of a professional field, as graduates earn a doctoral degree and provide direct clinical care; however, the discipline was not included among the named professions.

The department's rule was published for an open comment period, which closed on March 2, 2026. The American Academy of Audiology submitted formal comments urging the

department to explicitly recognize audiology as a professional degree program within the final rule. In its submission to the U.S. Department of Education, the Academy emphasized how the AuD meets the definition, and if passed, the unintended consequences:

- The Doctor of Audiology (AuD) is the required entry-level degree for licensure.
- Audiologists complete rigorous doctoral-level academic preparation and extensive supervised clinical training.
- The educational scope, duration, and clinical intensity of AuD programs are comparable to other healthcare doctorates currently recognized as professional degree programs.
- The rule will create unnecessary financial barriers for students and increase debt burdens.
- Putting student audiologists at risk for completing AuD programs due to financial constraints, as well as deterring prospective students, undermines workforce pipeline stability.
- The downstream effect can lead to reduced access to hearing and balance care, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

The Academy urged the Department to clearly include audiology in the final regulatory definition to promote consistency and equity across similarly situated healthcare professions. With the comment period now closed, the Department will review comments and determine whether changes will be made before issuing the final rule. The Academy will continue monitoring the rulemaking process and provide updates as additional information becomes available.

[View the Academy's Letter](#)

Thank You to Our Members

The Academy would like to thank the audiologists, students, educators, and advocates who submitted personalized comments during the rulemaking process. Individual stories, data, and professional insight strengthen the collective voice of the profession and reinforce the real-world impact of federal policy decisions.

Your engagement demonstrates a strong and united commitment to protecting the future of audiology education and preserving patient access to hearing and balance care. The Academy is grateful for your continued advocacy and dedication to advancing the profession.

Congress Needs to Hear from Audiologists on Student Loan Access

The Professional Student Degree Act, H.R. 6718, introduced by Representative Michael Lawler (R-NY), was introduced in mid-December. This bill reaffirms audiology's status as a professional degree under federal law, a necessary step to protecting student loan access for the next generation of audiologists. The language updates the Higher Education Act to define which programs qualify as professional degrees and explicitly includes audiology as one of these programs. This clarification ensures that students enrolled in AuD programs remain eligible for the higher federal student loan limits intended for doctoral-level professional education.

Currently, H.R. 6718 has only four cosponsors. Advocacy is crucial for this bill to progress during the 2026 legislative session, and the Academy needs our members to help build the momentum necessary for congressional action.

Why This Is Urgent:

Audiologists are licensed healthcare professionals who complete doctoral-level education and extensive clinical training. Federal student loan policy has historically recognized this by allowing higher borrowing limits for professional degree programs.

Recent changes to federal student loan law have created uncertainty about which programs could qualify. Without congressional clarification, audiology students face barriers to accessing higher federal loan limits, increased reliance on private or higher interest borrowing, and greater financial barriers to entering the profession.

Demand for hearing and balance care continues to grow across the country. Representatives need to understand that this issue directly affects their constituents, access to care in their states, and the future stability of the audiology workforce.

Take Action and Help Build Momentum!

So far, fewer than 100 Academy members have sent messages to Congress on this issue. We need to significantly increase that number to demonstrate strong, nationwide support.

This legislation affects the future of audiology and the students that many of our members teach, advise, mentor, and employ. Keeping the profession strong starts with protecting the pathway into it.

We urge you to contact your U.S. Representative today and ask them to cosponsor the Professional Student Degree Act, H.R. 6718. Please share this issue on social media and with your colleagues and peers, encouraging them to speak up.

Take action today and help move this legislation forward.

[Take Action](#)

State Updates

Academy Files Rulemaking Petition in Virginia

Last year, the Virginia Board of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology finalized regulatory changes to remove direct ties between certification and licensure, with the intention of streamlining licensure. These proposed rules removed ABA language from the regulations, for which the Academy submitted comments in opposition. However, the rule was fast-tracked and passed as written.

After the rule was adopted, the Academy met with the Virginia board staff to understand the scope and intent of the changes. Based on discussions, in December, the Academy formally submitted a petition for rulemaking to restore the ABA language. This petition requested that ABA certification be reinstated in the regulations to ensure fairness, clarity, and consistency for audiologists seeking licensure in Virginia.

The petition for rulemaking was published, and the public comment period officially opened on January 12, and closed on February 11, 2026. Now, the board will review the submitted comments at its next scheduled meeting, currently set for April 21, 2026.

Wisconsin Bill Seeks to Update Audiology Scope of Practice

At the beginning of 2026, the Wisconsin legislature introduced [Assembly Bill 820 \(AB 820\)](#). This bill updates the existing statute by:

- adding explicit diagnosis, management, and treatment authority to the definition of audiology.
- authorizing audiologists to perform cerumen removal and foreign body removal.
- allowing audiologists to order cultures, bloodwork, imaging, genetic testing, and prescription medications as part of patient care; and
- establishing clear exclusions related to surgery and imaging interpretation, ensuring appropriate safeguards and professional boundaries.

The Academy supports policies that allow audiologists to practice at the top of their education, training, and licensure to improve patient access to high-quality hearing and balance care. Wisconsin Assembly Bill 820 seeks to modernize the statutory definition of the practice of audiology to the benefit of the public. We are supportive of these efforts, so long as appropriate patient and practitioner safeguards are established.

Kentucky Legislature Considers Updates to Audiology Scope of Practice

In early March, the Academy recently submitted a letter to the Kentucky House Standing Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations regarding [House Bill 444 \(HB 444\)](#), legislation that aims to update the scope of practice for audiologists.

Given the evolving nature of scope of practice discussions, HB 444 has generated conversation among stakeholders. Supporters of the bill indicate that these updates are intended to modernize existing law and reduce administrative barriers that can delay care, particularly in rural and underserved communities. As drafted, the bill would allow the evaluation of auditory and vestibular conditions and add other services, such as prescribing hearing aids, conducting health screenings, performing cerumen management, ordering certain laboratory tests and non-radiographic imaging, and prescribing topical otologic pharmaceuticals.

In its letter, the Academy emphasized the importance of ensuring patients have access to comprehensive, coordinated hearing healthcare while recognizing the need for statutory frameworks to keep pace with current clinical standards. The Academy shared its perspective with both the committee and the Kentucky audiology community as the legislative process continues.

[View the Academy's Letter](#)

Academy Supports Louisiana Legislation to Update Audiology Scope of Practice

The Louisiana legislature is currently considering House Bill 925 (HB 925), introduced during the 2026 regular session. This legislation aims to update statutory definitions related to the practice of audiology and speech-language pathology. HB 925 provides clarity around the services audiologists may provide in the diagnosis and evaluation of hearing and balance disorders. Specifically, the legislation would:

- remove the requirement for a physician referral before audiologists provide services for vestibular (balance) disorders.
- allow audiologists to order certain tests related to auditory and vestibular conditions, including cultures, blood work testing, and radiographic imaging.
- permit audiologists to perform in-office, non-radiographic testing of the external auditory canal when evaluating hearing and balance disorders.

By clarifying the services audiologists may provide and removing unnecessary barriers such as mandatory physician referrals for vestibular care, legislation like HB 925 can help improve patient access to timely hearing and balance evaluations.

The American Academy of Audiology has submitted a letter of support to the Louisiana House Health and Welfare Committee, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that state law accurately reflects the education, training, and clinical competencies of audiologists.

[View the Academy's Letter](#)

Other News

State Policy Advocate Network Kicks Off 2026

The State Policy Advocate Network (SPAN) held its first meeting of 2026 on January 28. This opening meeting of the year focused on state affairs, setting the stage for

collaboration and coordination among advocates as legislative sessions get underway across the country.

Participants shared their state organization's initiatives for the year, as well as legislative or regulatory priorities they are advancing in their states. This discussion-based meeting fostered peer-to-peer learning, identified common challenges and opportunities, and strengthened advocacy efforts at the state level.

As state legislatures and regulatory bodies kicked off in early 2026, this meeting provided a crucial opportunity for SPAN members to exchange insights, identify emerging issues, and align on strategies to support audiology-related policy goals nationwide.

If you are interested in attending future meetings, please contact Michelle Moore, Manager of Government Relations, at mmoore@audiology.org.

Amplifying Audiology's Voice: Advocacy Ambassador Program

The Academy is launching the Advocacy Ambassador Program, a grassroots advocacy program to strengthen audiology's voice nationwide. The program will debut at the AAA Annual Convention 2026 in San Antonio. Members attend four government relations sessions covering policy and advocacy skills to become official Ambassadors.

Why Grassroots Advocacy Matters

Audiologists face challenges, including licensure threats, reimbursement barriers, workforce shortages, and patient access issues. Federal advocacy is important, but state and local engagement is crucial. Policymakers respond best to constituents who live and work in their communities, and grassroots advocacy ensures audiologists have a seat at the table.

The Role of Ambassadors

- Ambassadors are trained Academy members who will:
- Build relationships with legislators and state officials.
- Lead outreach and mobilize advocacy action.
- Represent the Academy at hearings, meetings, and events.
- Receive recognition and badges for their leadership.

- This program connects the national organization with on-the-ground advocates who respond quickly to emerging policy issues.

Join the Movement

The Advocacy Ambassador Program empowers members to advocate for the profession and patients, ensuring audiology's voice is heard at every level of government.

Save the Date: April 22–25, 2026 | San Antonio, TX

Rock the PAC: An Evening of Music, Networking, and Advocacy

Wednesday, April 22 | 7:00–9:00 pm | Buffalo Blue, San Antonio, TX

Step into history at Buffalo Blue, a mid-19th century landmark in San Antonio's La Villita Village, where German design meets Texas country charm. This unique venue, featuring stunning architecture and a beautiful River Walk patio, sets the stage for an unforgettable evening.

Rock the PAC offers members a chance to network, enjoy live music, and sip handcrafted drinks, all while supporting the Academy's Political Action Committee (PAC) and its advocacy for the audiology profession. Each attendee receives two drink tickets; food is available for purchase. A live band will play classic rock and country favorites, taking song requests and keeping the energy lively all night.

Tickets: \$75 | Academy Members & U.S. Residents

Space is limited, reserve your spot today and join us for a night of historic charm, great company, and advocacy in action!

Have questions? Contact a member of the government relations team:

Michelle Moore, mmoore@audiology.org

Joanne Zurcher, jzurcher@audiology.org