



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

**Board of Examiners For
Speech-Language Pathology & Audiology**
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November 18, 2019

To: The Legislative Assembly
From: Erin K. Haag, Executive Director
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RE: Senate Bill 855 (2019)

Senate Bill 855, which became effective June 20, 2019, directs professional licensing boards to study the manner in which persons who are immigrants or refugees become authorized to practice regulated occupations or professions, and to develop and implement methods to reduce barriers to licensure for these persons. The purpose of this memo is to report on progress of the Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology (BSPA/"the Board") in meeting the requirements of the bill.

License Types and Requirements

The Board regulates the practices of audiology and speech-language pathology in Oregon per Oregon Revised Statutes 681.205 through 681.505. BSPA's rules are found in OAR 335 Division 1 through Division 95. License types include Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) active and SLP inactive, Audiologist active and inactive, Combination Audiologist-SLP active and inactive, Conditional Speech-Language Pathologist (C-SLP) (there is no inactive license for this category), Speech-Language Pathology Assistant Certificate (SLPA) active and inactive, Provisional Speech-Language Pathology Assistant Certificate (P-SLPA) (there is no inactive license for this category). The Board is adding an active military license.

Educational requirements vary by license type:

Audiologist – per statute, the Board requires a doctorate in Audiology from an approved college or university that is fully accredited or conditionally approved by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA). For those who obtained their education prior to 2007, the Board accepts a Master's degree and other requirements. The program must have been conducted in English or the Board may require the individual to take the TOEFL test and obtain a particular score as described in rule. This is also true for SLP and SLPA applicants. In addition, if the program is not on the ASHA approved list (i.e. international applicant) then they must select and submit their college transcript to an ASHA approved transcript service and the degree must be found to be equivalent to the US degree.

Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) – per statute, the Board requires a master's or doctoral degree, also from an ASHA-approved program, of which there are dozens across the United States.

Speech-Language Pathology Assistant (SLPA) – Educational requirements are described in rule and include 45 general college credits and 45 college credits in communication sciences and disorders, or a program approved by the Board (currently Chemeketa Community College's two year program meets this criteria and is approved by the Board). The rules are being changed and after 1/1/2022, the

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Board will require an associate's degree in speech-language pathology assisting, or a bachelor's degree in communication sciences and disorders. Individuals who obtained their license before that date will be allowed to continue to renew their licenses without obtaining a degree.

Clinical experience required prior to licensure:

Audiologists: The clinical fellowship for audiologists occurs while they are still enrolled in their doctoral program.

Speech-Language Pathologists: The Board requires successful completion of a post-graduate supervised clinical fellowship of 1,260 hours. Clinical fellows must obtain the Oregon Conditional SLP license before commencing their fellowship.

Speech-Language Pathology Assistants: must complete 100 hours of fieldwork which must be directly supervised 100% of the time by a licensed SLP. If they are not enrolled in an SLPA program while conducting their fieldwork, then they must first obtain the Provisional SLPA Certificate before beginning their fieldwork.

National Examination: Audiologists and SLPs must have a passing score on their profession's national Praxis test. There is currently no examination for SLPAs.

Criminal background checks: upon initial licensure, all applicants must provide the Board with an FBI fingerprint background check. That rule was instituted in 2015 and existing licensees at that time have not received a fingerprint background check. License renewals occur every two years, and at that time staff conducts a LEDS background check on each licensee and opens cases as needed. BSPA opened 2 cases of failure to report an arrest or conviction in 2016, and found no such cases in 2018. (LEDS is only an Oregon/regional check, not a national FBI fingerprint check).

Other background checks: The board reviews past licensure history in Oregon, other states and professional associations to review whether any past disciplinary history has a bearing on their ability to practice safely with students/patients/clients in Oregon. The Board verifies all documents at their source.

Exemption to Board Licensure: In 2015, Oregon established universal licensure for speech-language pathologists in all work settings. In the past the state allowed individuals with a license from the Oregon Teachers Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC) with an endorsement for speech and communication disorders to work under that license. The exemption allows individuals who held that endorsement prior to 1/1/2016 to continue to work in educational settings only. After that date, TSPC discontinued issuance of new licenses with the SLP endorsement and all licensure is now through BSPA for all work settings because the board oversees the practice of audiology and speech-language pathology in Oregon.

Agency Process re SB 855:

The Board has begun to study the path to licensure for immigrants and refugees in order to discover any barriers for these individuals, and will discuss the matter at length during the May, 2020 Board meeting. The discussion will cover not only possible existing barriers, but also how the Board might conduct public education and community outreach to reduce barriers. The Board will also examine whether there could be adjustments in any licensure qualification requirements.

The Board is moving to a new database this month that might allow us to collect additional data to inform this process. For example, currently we are able to determine if a licensee obtained their education internationally but not whether they are immigrants or refugees. We will also be reaching out to immigrant and refugee groups for information on possible barriers and to develop avenues for two way communication about their needs, and the Board's requirements. Last summer but Board received inquiries from speech-language pathologists who wanted to volunteer to provide treatment for children who are being held at ICE compounds. There may be opportunities to deploy bi-lingual SLPs or other health professionals to not only provide treatment but to identify possible future licensees. Currently some individuals might have a path to licensure as a full SLP if they first become licensed in Oregon as an SLPA while completing their educational and test score requirements. Immigrants and refugees might not currently be aware of that option.

National standards and requirements in many cases are not flexible for purposes of certifying and licensing immigrants and refugees due to a need for consistency in the way we treat applicants. Historically Oregon and the majority of other state Boards look to the American Speech-Language & Hearing Association (ASHA) to set educational and certification standards, which the Boards adopt. So for example in 2007, ASHA and the American Academy of Audiology (AAA) moved from a masters to a doctoral degree requirement for audiologists and Oregon and other states followed suit. Our Board currently requires through rule a particular score in the English TOEFL test if the applicant did not complete their degree program in English. BSPA will research whether Oregon's English TOEFL score requirement is consistent with other states and ASHA standards and if not, will consider changing them.

The Board's Executive Director also sits on the national Compact Licensure Advisory Committee which is looking to establish a compact similar to the national physical therapy compact. A major goal of the national compact is to ease licensure of individuals if they move from one state to another, which can help military spouses in particular. If Oregon joins the compact, it would likely be good for immigrants and refugees as well, although there is a danger that the compact's requirements could be prohibitive. For example, the Oregon Board does not require licensees to provide a social security number, but the compact plans to require it. In order to be part of the compact, Oregon will need an agreement with them to accept several other forms of identifying personal information in lieu of the social security number. The Board will issue another progress report on these matters by June 1, 2020.

Please contact the Board's Executive Director, Erin Haag, for additional information or a copy of this report: Erin.Haag@state.or.us.