

ASSEMBLY AGING AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 3545

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 23, 2025

The Assembly Aging and Human Services Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 3545.

This bill establishes requirements to provide certain services to children who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as their parents or guardians, to help the child achieve certain benchmarks in the development of the child's sign or spoken language.

Specifically, the bill provides for children and their parents or guardians participating in the program to participate in certain including, but not be limited to: (1) holding two meetings per year between the child, the child's parent or guardian, and a language team until the child's sign or spoken language development meets the objective criteria and developmental benchmarks set forth by the early intervention program; and (2) pairing the child's parent or guardian with a mentor.

The mentor will be required to: provide guidance to, and share personal insights with, the parent or guardian about living day to day as a person who is deaf or hard of hearing; be a member of the child's language team and play an active role in the child's language development; and be trained as a SKI-HI deaf mentor in accordance with the SKI-HI Deaf Mentor Manual training program.

In the case of a toddler who is under the age of three, these activities will be provided by through the Department of Health's (DOH) early intervention program. In the case of a child between the ages of three and five, the activities will be provided through the Department of Education (DOE). The DOE program will be limited to children who previously received services through the early intervention program. A child receiving services under the DOE may continue in the program until the child enters kindergarten or elementary school. A toddler aging out of the DOH program may be eligible for the DOE program.

A child who is deaf or hard of hearing and is eligible to receive the services outlined in the bill is to be automatically enrolled to receive the services provided by a language team unless the child's parent or guardian declines the services.

As defined in the bill: "language team" means a team consisting of a pediatric audiologist, a teacher of the deaf or hard of hearing, a deaf mentor, and a speech and language pathologist; "pediatric audiologist" means a licensed professional trained to test, diagnose,

evaluate, and manage the presence, extent, and reason for hearing loss and other hearing-related issues in infants and children, and to provide recommendations for interventions or rehabilitation, including, but not limited to, prescribing hearing aids or other assistive devices; and “speech and language pathologist” means a licensed professional trained to identify, assess, and rehabilitate persons with speech, voice, or language disorders.