



# SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

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Chairman Bob Casey

## Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act

The allied health workforce is in need of diversification. Professionals in the fields of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, respiratory therapy and audiology are overwhelmingly Caucasian. A 2018 workforce study conducted by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) found that over 92 percent of occupational therapists identified as Caucasian, 3.1 percent identified as African-American, 3.2 percent identified as Hispanic and 1.4 percent identified as multi-ethnic. The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) reports that only eight percent of SLPs are non-Caucasian. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) reports that only 13 percent of PTs in the country are non-Caucasian.

In addition to the lack of ethnic diversity in these allied health fields, the number of practicing professionals with disabilities is less than five percent according to AOTA. Exacerbating the lack of disabled professionals is the fact that most allied health professionals with disabilities enter the field after their own treatment and therefore are often late career professionals.

The population of people treated by OTs, PTs, SLPs, RTs and audiologists is far more diverse than the professionals treating them. According to the Institutes of Medicine, over 40 percent of individuals receiving therapeutic treatment are non-Caucasian. An Institutes of Medicine report found that patients that receive treatment from professionals of similar ethnic background often trust their therapists more and are more likely to follow-through on their treatment.

The Allied Health Diversity Workforce Act would create a \$5 million a year grant program that will provide grants and stipends for students of diverse ethnic backgrounds or students with disabilities in programs preparing occupational therapists, physical therapist, speech-language pathologists, respiratory therapists and audiologists. The bill is time limited, providing grants to eligible universities and other preparation programs for a total of five years. There is a companion bill in the House being introduced by Reps. Bobby Rush (D-IL-1<sup>st</sup>) and Markwayne Mullin (R-OK-2<sup>nd</sup>).

**Original co-sponsor:** Sen. Lisa Murkowski

**Supporting Organizations:** American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), American Academy of Physical Therapy (AAPPT), American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), American Academy of Audiology (AAA), American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC), Asian/Pacific Occupational Therapy Association (APHOTA), National Association of Black Physical Therapist (NABPT), National Black Occupational Therapy Coalition, Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity, Multicultural, Diversity, and Inclusion (MDI) Network, The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD),

Pennsylvania Society of Respiratory Care, American Physical Therapy Association Pennsylvania Chapter, Alaska Society for Respiratory Care, Alaska Physical Therapy Association, Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Association, Alaska Occupational Association, The University of Alaska Anchorage College of Health, Creighton University & University of Alaska-Anchorage Joint Occupational Therapy Program, University of Pittsburgh-School of Occupational Therapy

To co-sponsor the legislation or for more information or questions about the bill contact Christian Clesi ([Christian\\_Clesi@aging.senate.gov](mailto:Christian_Clesi@aging.senate.gov)) or Angela Ramponi ([Angela\\_Ramponi@murkowski.senate.gov](mailto:Angela_Ramponi@murkowski.senate.gov)).