

CHAPTER 255

AN ACT establishing a task force for the study of State policy regarding hearing impairment.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. a. There is established in the Department of Human Services the “New Jersey Hearing Impairment Task Force.” The purpose of the task force shall be to study, compare, and evaluate State laws, regulations, and policies intended to improve the livelihood of individuals who have a hearing impairment, including but not limited to children, seniors, and veterans.

b. The task force shall consist of 14 members, as follows:

(1) The Commissioner of Human Services, the Commissioner of Education, the Commissioner of Banking and Insurance, and the Director of the Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, or their designees, who shall serve *ex officio*;

(2) Three public members appointed by the President of the Senate as follows: one of whom is a person diagnosed with a hearing impairment; one person upon the recommendation of the AARP New Jersey; and one person upon the recommendation of the AMVETS New Jersey;

(3) Three public members appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly as follows: one of whom is a parent of a child diagnosed with a hearing impairment; one person who is a physician with a specialty in pediatric otolaryngology; and one person who is a physician with a specialty in geriatric otolaryngology; and

(4) Four public members appointed by the Governor, as follows: one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey State School Nurses Association; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Speech-Language-Hearing Association; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Academy of Audiology; and one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Association of Health Hearing Professionals.

c. The public members shall serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed for travel and other necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and within the limits of funds available to the task force.

d. The task force shall organize as soon as practicable following the appointment of its members, and shall select a chairperson from among its members. The task force may appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the task force.

e. The task force shall meet at the call of the chairperson and hold hearings at the times and in the places it deems necessary and appropriate to fulfill its charge. The task force shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of employees of any State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it may require and as may be available for its purposes.

f. The Department of Human Services shall provide staff support to the task force.

2. a. It shall be the duty of the New Jersey Hearing Impairment Task Force to study and assess New Jersey laws, regulations, and policies related to hearing impairment in comparison to other states, including:

(1) the effectiveness of New Jersey health insurance mandates related to hearing impairment in comparison to health insurance mandates in other states;

(2) the accessibility and effectiveness of medical testing for individuals who may have a hearing impairment;

(3) the accessibility of hearing aids and assistive technologies for individuals who have a hearing impairment;

(4) the accessibility and effectiveness of rehabilitation services for individuals who have a hearing impairment; and

(5) the effectiveness of educational policies on the identification, evaluation, and support of children who have a hearing impairment.

b. The task force shall receive reports and testimony from independent experts, other qualified individuals, and members of the public who have experience in this State or other states in evaluating the effectiveness of state policies related to hearing impairment.

3. The task force shall issue a final report to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1) no later than 180 days after its first organizational meeting. The report shall provide a summary of the study conducted by the task force and shall enumerate any recommended changes to State law, regulation, or policy. The report shall be made available to the public through a link prominently displayed on the Governor's and the Legislature's official internet websites.

4. This act shall take effect on the 180th day after the date of enactment, and sections 1 through 3 of this act shall expire upon the task force's issuance of its final report pursuant to section 3 of this act.

Approved January 8, 2018.