Good morning.

My name is Rob Melchionna, I’m a speech language pathologist at Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis, and a board certified specialist in swallowing and swallowing disorders. I’m also current President of the Massachusetts Speech Language Hearing Association (MSHA). I’ve been involved on MSHA’s executive council for close to a decade now and we’ve spent a considerable amount of that time working on implementing provisional licensure in the state.. So I’m very excited that we are here today and can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

My colleagues Jennifer Mackay and Dayna Fisk will also be speaking and will provide a very good summary of why passing this law and getting provisional licensure implemented is so important to us. I will say, that as important as it is to us, it’s more important to the graduate students in Massachusetts SLP programs, and to the clients we serve as SLPs. I can give a real-world example that can show why this issue is so important and why it’s been so frustrating for those of us working in health care. I remember some years ago when I was working with patients in a short term rehab setting. These were primarily elderly people who had impairments in their swallowing, their ability to communicate, or in their cognition. We had an excellent rehab team and were proud of the fact that we were usually able to help our patients improve in all of those areas and eventually return home successfully. We were very busy and were trying with no luck to hire an additional SLP to help take care of our large caseload of clients. We finally did hire someone…she lived in RI and commuted into Massachusetts. Meanwhile I had students I had been supervising who were graduating and would have been perfect for the job, and we were unable to hire them. They were finishing school and moving out of state to do their CF, and I know of many who never returned. Meanwhile the SLP we hired, who was commuting from RI, had been having difficulty finding a job in that state because RI facilities were hiring CFs who were coming out of Massachusetts grad schools. And then eventually the commute became too much for her, she found a job closer to home in RI, and left. I wish I could say that I’m embellishing this story, but it’s true, and I imagine there are many similar ones out there.

I’ve been a speech language pathologist since 1997 and have supervised graduate students in their clinical placements for almost my entire career. Over the past decade Massachusetts has lost countless highly educated young professionals to other states, while employers are unable to hire new graduates, and the clients who need services are not able to obtain them in a timely fashion. As MSHA president I regularly answer emails from potential employers asking when they will be able to hire clinical fellows. As a clinician I hear from my patients that they are sometimes waiting months to see an SLP. I don’t have data in front of me but I’m sure there’s a shortage of SLPs in Massachusetts; I get frequent voicemails and texts from recruiters looking to hire speech pathologists.. I got two just yesterday. Meanwhile we are graduating hundreds of new SLPs every year in Massachusetts. I hear from the students I supervise that they want to stay and live and work in the state but are unable to do so, no one will hire them for medical positions if they can’t bill insurance for the first 9 months. Implementing provisional licensure will not be a panacea and fix all of these issues overnight, but it’s a big start. I’m hopeful that this can be finalized as soon as possible. Thank you.