

NZSTA Submission: Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Select Committee

Regulatory Standards Bill 2025

Submission 12 June 2025

To: Finance and Expenditure Committee

By upload to [NZ Parliament](#)

Submitted by the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA)

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1. Introduction

The New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA) is the national body responsible for leading and regulating the speech-language therapy profession in Aotearoa. Our mission is to uphold standards of excellence, promote equity and innovation, and protect the public through trusted, values-led practice. Our vision is to empower voices and enhance lives — through leadership, standards, and trusted professional practice.

We write to express our strong opposition to the Regulatory Standards Bill (RSB). As an organisation grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and dedicated to serving the public good, we have serious concerns that this Bill undermines the very principles that support equitable, accessible, and safe services — particularly for those most at risk of exclusion.

2. Executive Summary

NZSTA opposes the Regulatory Standards Bill because:

- It weakens the role of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in public life and law

- It entrenches ideological values that prioritise property over people.
- It threatens the delivery and sustainability of safe, equitable services.
- It creates avenues for corporate legal challenges to regulation in the public interest.
- It undermines democratic oversight and community participation.
- It poses risks to the protection of public safety and wellbeing.

We recommend the Bill be withdrawn. If it is progressed, significant changes must be made to safeguard the rights and interests of all people in Aotearoa.

3. Alignment with NZSTA’s Mission and Concerns

3.1 Protecting the Public Through Trusted Practice

NZSTA exists to lead and support the speech-language therapy profession while protecting the public through high standards, cultural safety, and ethical practice. The Bill, by elevating private interests over collective responsibility, weakens the legal foundation for regulating in the public interest. This will make it harder for government and public bodies to uphold the safety, rights, and wellbeing of tamariki, whānau, and communities — particularly those living with disability, communication challenges, or systemic disadvantage.

3.2 Undermining Te Tiriti o Waitangi

NZSTA is committed to a Tiriti-honouring future. The Bill omits Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the collective rights and responsibilities it upholds, instead privileging narrow definitions of individual property rights. This risks marginalising Māori voices and undermining tino rangatiratanga, kaitiakitanga, and kaupapa Māori approaches embedded across our profession. The Crown has already been found to be in breach of its obligations by failing to consult Māori on this Bill in a meaningful manner.

3.3 Equity and Innovation at Risk

Equity is a core pillar of NZSTA’s mission. The Bill threatens targeted support for underserved populations — including Māori, Pasifika, disabled and rural whānau — by constraining the government's ability to regulate or invest in public services equitably. It risks chilling innovation by creating legal uncertainty and deterring new policies that support social inclusion, disability rights, and language revitalisation.

3.4 Empowering Corporates Over Communities

The Regulatory Standards Bill risks shifting regulatory power away from Parliament and communities and towards private entities with vested interests. The proposed Regulatory Standards Board, coupled with the Bill's strong emphasis on individual and property rights, creates avenues for corporations to challenge or obstruct necessary regulations — even those introduced to address clear public needs.

Example: Under-regulation in Speech-language Therapy Services:

Currently, Aotearoa lacks overarching regulatory standards to ensure consistent access to speech-language therapy across health, education, justice, mental health and disability services. As a result, access to therapy is highly variable — often depending on location, funding pathways, or whether a person can afford to pay privately.

- In education, there is no legal right to speech-language therapy for children with communication needs. Services are capped, and wait times are long — particularly for Māori and learners with disabilities.
- In aged care, there is no regulatory requirement for facilities to have ongoing access to speech-language therapy despite high rates of swallowing and communication disorders that can severely affect health and quality of life. An SLT assessment alone isn't enough. For real impact, staff require support, training, and ongoing feedback to implement the care plan effectively. Otherwise, it's not a service — it's a missed opportunity.
- In community health, speech-language therapy is not routinely integrated into primary care. Many people with preventable conditions miss out on early support due to system gaps and the lack of policy direction.
- Despite clear evidence that communication difficulties are highly prevalent in the prison population, speech-language therapy (SLT) is neither mandated nor consistently available within Aotearoa New Zealand's corrections system. This regulatory gap results in significant unmet need and deepens inequities in access to health, education, rehabilitation, and justice.
- In mental health, 0.5 FTE is allocated to speech-language therapy nationwide in New Zealand.
- International research indicates that 40–60% of people in prison have undiagnosed or unsupported speech, language, and communication needs. These challenges affect

comprehension of legal processes, participation in rehabilitation, engagement in education and employment, and safe social interaction. The disproportionate impact on Māori further entrenches longstanding inequities and underscores the Crown's Te Tiriti obligation to protect Māori health, education, and justice outcomes actively.

- Māori are overrepresented in speech, language, communication and swallowing needs. This proposed bill presents a risk as references to Te Tiriti and cultural safety could lead to further marginalisation of Māori if they are not prioritised.

This under-regulation leaves many without the services they need and contributes to long-term inequities in communication, learning, and health outcomes. Rather than enabling targeted reforms to address these gaps, the Regulatory Standards Bill could make it harder for future governments to introduce new regulations or set national standards — particularly if those reforms are challenged as “imposing costs” on service providers. The result would be the entrenchment of existing disparities, not their resolution.

3.5 Constitutional and Professional Instability

Trusted professional practice relies on a stable, fair regulatory environment. This Bill introduces legal and financial uncertainty that could affect service planning, funding, workforce development, and public confidence in regulation. It risks undermining the responsiveness of the health system and public trust in professional and regulatory bodies like ours.

4. Recommendations

NZSTA strongly recommends that the Regulatory Standards Bill be withdrawn. However, if it proceeds:

1. Embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi: Make explicit provision for Te Tiriti and Māori rights in all regulatory principles and processes.
2. Protect Collective Interests: Remove or limit the compensation clause for regulatory impacts on private profits.
3. Strengthen Democratic Oversight: Remove extraordinary powers granted to the Minister for Regulation and the proposed Board.
4. Safeguard Public Service Equity: Ensure the Bill does not constrain equity-focused policies, especially in health, education, and disability services.

5. Support Evidence-Informed Regulation: Build on existing mechanisms (e.g. LDAC Guidelines) rather than introducing a parallel system that privileges ideology over expertise.

5. Conclusion

The Regulatory Standards Bill would alter the foundations of law-making in Aotearoa, sidelining Te Tiriti, community voice, and public accountability in favour of private interest. This is not the direction that will empower voices or enhance lives. On behalf of our members — and the communities they serve — we urge the Select Committee to reject the Bill.

Ngā mihi nui,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Smolloy'.

Siobhan Molloy

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www.speechtherapy.org.nz