

To: Members of the Ohio House Health Committee

Fr: Monica Hueckel, Senior Director of Government Relations, Ohio State Medical Association
Joe Rosato, Director of Government Relations, Ohio State Medical Association

Da: February 4, 2020

Re: HB 243

On behalf of the Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA), the state's oldest and largest professional organization representing Ohio physicians, medical residents, and medical students, we are writing today in support of House Bill 243, which would require health plan issuers to cover hearing aids and related services for persons under 22 years of age.

As you have previously heard from the sponsors, 23 states currently have state laws requiring some coverage of children's hearing aids. For many private insurance plans, hearing aids are defined as "elective" or "cosmetic" devices, and parents are forced to pay entirely out-of-pocket for their child's hearing aids. This can be difficult and unmanageable for many families to afford.

Since Ohio already requires that newborns be screened for hearing loss, HB 243 is a logical next step, helping more children access appropriate intervention. What HB 243 accomplishes is important because the early stage detection and intervention of hearing loss in children is critical to ensuring better speech, language, social, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes. By making hearing aids more affordable through insurance coverage and thus accessible to more Ohio children, this legislation would profoundly impact many Ohio families for the better.

HB 243 also complements one of the key priorities of Governor DeWine's administration: a children's initiative focusing on growth and development of infants, toddlers, and youth in Ohio. A stated goal of this initiative is to identify young children who could be behind in behavioral, social, academic, or physical development and help these children and their families access resources which are designed to support the child's needs.

The OSMA looks forward to continuing to work with the sponsors and other interested parties to clarify some of the provider definitions in the bill.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. The OSMA is grateful to be a meaningful part of the legislative process. As always, please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions.