Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Health Committee:

My name is Ellie Warren. I am a junior at Hilliard Davidson High School, where I enjoy swimming on the swim team, volunteering as a teacher’s assistant for ASL class, and participating in our mock trial team as a lawyer. When I was first diagnosed with moderate bilateral hearing loss, I was 3 ½ years old, and I have worn hearing aids ever since. My hearing loss is a part of who I am; I will wear hearing aids for the rest of my life.

My first pair of hearing aids cost about $2500, and the insurance through my father’s employer paid nothing.  But that isn’t the end of the story. I have 3 siblings, and 2 of them have hearing loss too. Tessa is in 7th grade and Toby is in 4th grade. Both of my parents are hearing. In short, my hearing loss caught us by surprise and so did the costs.  Between the hearing aids, audiology visits, accessories, ear molds and batteries, looking at our family’s bills, we can estimate that the *non-covered* expenses of having one child in hearing aids is approximately $4500 - per year.  When you have 3 children in hearing aids, those costs can rise to over $13,000 annually.

The reality of our situation is that each of us needs new hearing aids every 3-4 years and our last hearing aids were purchased 3 years ago.

As a student, I use my hearing aids almost every moment that I am awake.  It’s how I communicate with my teachers and my classmates at school. It’s how I can talk on the phone. It’s how I’ve been able to have job interviews. It’s how I do normal teenage things, like listening to music, participating in mock trial, and talking to my friends.  This is what my hearing aids mean to me. It’s my connection to communication with my family and friends as well as access to my education.

As a junior in high school, I am considering my future opportunities.  I spent last summer at the Hillman Cancer Center in Pittsburgh, working in the Bakkenist Lab on pre-clinical cancer research.  I am touring colleges and universities, planning on majoring in biology with an eye on graduate studies in medicine. I am working on a science fair submission based on my research last summer.  Throughout all of this, I use my hearing aids to help me communicate with employers, coworkers, friends, and mentors.

My hearing loss is a part of who I am.  I will always need to be able to access sound.  I needed hearing aids when I was 3 ½. I needed them when I was 6 and played soccer.  I needed them when I was 13 and ran cross country. I need them in highschool to help me understand AP Biology and Calculus.  I will need them as an undergraduate student. I will need them as a medical resident. I will need them when I’m a doctor. Access to sound is access to my community, my school, my employers, and hopefully, one day, my patients.

Ohio House Bill 243 addresses this critical need for Ohio’s deaf and hard-of-hearing kids like me.  In supporting this bill, you are supporting future doctors, teachers, students, citizens, employers, neighbors, and families.  Thank you for your support.