

House Bill 198: Proponent Testimony  
Ohio House Health Committee  
Karen L. Klugo, M.D. & Alexis M. Klugo  
May 10, 2021

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chairman Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and Members of the House Health Committee:

Good morning. My name is Karen Klugo. I am an ophthalmologist in Cincinnati, and I have two children who were born with congenital hearing loss. Today I am here to talk to you as both a physician and as a parent. My daughter, Alexis, who stands here with me was diagnosed with moderate hearing loss at birth. Thanks to the Ohio newborn screening legislation, her hearing loss was detected in the hospital just a day after she was born. Three years later, my son Chase was found to have moderate severe hearing loss also right after he was born. Chase began wearing hearing aids at just three weeks of age.

When Alexis was fitted with her first pair of hearing aids, I was shocked to learn that not one penny of the devices was covered by our insurance. In fact, any services associated with her hearing loss was not covered. These costs add up, and both children have required many audiology visits to fine tune their hearing aids. As an eye physician and surgeon, I help patients daily to improve their eyesight so they can use their vital sense of vision. Vision services are covered as a medical expense by insurance for these patients, so why wouldn't another very vital sense like hearing be treated the same way?

Children with hearing loss need their hearing aids to learn to speak, to communicate with others, to interact with their peers, and to eventually become productive members of society. Today, a pair of hearing aids can cost between \$3000-\$6000 dollars. There are many families in our state that simply can't afford the out-of-pocket expense for hearing aids and the ancillary services that will provide their children with the same opportunities as hearing children. Children who do not get these necessary devices cost more money in the end. A child with hearing loss who does not receive necessary intervention may cost between \$400,000-\$500,000 during their educational years. That same child may then cost an additional \$500,000 in public support as an adult. This is a far greater expense than the cost of hearing aids.

So far, twenty-four other states have already passed legislation similar to HB198. States such as Texas, Georgia, Nebraska, and even our neighboring state of Kentucky, now provide hearing aids and hearing related services to the children of their state. Many of these states have easily passed these bills with bi-partisan support.

I was a small business owner for seventeen years. I understand the concerns of businesses and the rising cost of insurance. But, please remember that the number of children in our state with hearing loss is finite; there are only so many children born or diagnosed each year with hearing loss. Moreover, states that have already passed this legislation estimate that the cost of insurance premiums has only gone up an additional .07-.38 cents per insured. This is mere

pennies compared to the dollars that our state will save in intervention costs. HB198 will provide access for many of these children whose families could not otherwise afford a very basic medical need. I strongly encourage Ohio's lawmakers to give the children of our state this opportunity.

## **ALEXIS' TESTIMONY**

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chairman Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and Members of the House Health Committee

Good morning! My name is Alexis Klugo and I am a freshman at Sycamore High School in Cincinnati, Ohio. I was diagnosed at birth with hearing loss and have been wearing hearing aids since I was eighteen months old. My audiologist called them my 'magic ears' and they truly are magic. Without my hearing aids, I could not effectively communicate with my teachers and peers or participate in class. My magic ears keep me safe so I can hear sounds like the doorbell, cars coming down the street, and the fire alarm.

I'd like to tell you a story about the moment that I realized we needed to help other children like me pay for their magic ears. When I was four years old, I was waiting to see the doctor, when I noticed another little girl sitting next to me. She had a "magic ear" just like me, but I realized that, unlike me, she only had one. I asked her if she had lost her other one and I will never forget her response. This little girl only had one hearing aid because her parents couldn't afford to get her two. HB198 will help children like this girl and their families so that they are able to learn, communicate, and grow up safely. Please support this bill and the future of children with hearing loss in our state. Let Ohio Hear!