

## HB 198 – Proponent Testimony by Derek Houston

### House Health Committee

Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chairman Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and members of the House Health Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 198, which would require health plan issuers to cover hearing aids and related services for persons twenty-one years of age and younger. My name is Derek Houston and I am a Professor at Ohio State University and have conducted research on language development in children who are deaf/hard-of-hearing for over 20 years. I support HB 198 because there is overwhelming evidence that early access to sound is critical for the development of spoken language and long-term educational and vocational outcomes. The lost opportunity costs to society as well as the personal costs to the individuals with hearing loss are enormous and far outweigh the relatively minor cost of covering hearing aids during early childhood. Ensuring access to sound early in life is good economics and contributes to a more inclusive society.