

Good morning, and thank you for being here.

What's it like to have normal hearing? I myself cannot answer that question. My name is Ellie Warren. I am currently a senior at Hilliard Davidson High School. You last heard from me a year ago when I was still a junior, and few things have changed, but my hearing loss has not. I was first diagnosed with moderate bilateral hearing loss when I was 3 ½ years old, and I have worn hearing aids ever since. My hearing loss is a part of who I am, and I will wear hearing aids for the rest of my life.

I'm sure you'll hear about the numbers-- the costs of having hearing aids, but it's easy for us to distance ourselves. They're just numbers. But they're not numbers to me. I have 3 siblings, and 2 of them have hearing loss too. Tessa is in 8th grade and Toby is in 5th. When you have 3 children in hearing aids, the costs of audiology services can rise to over \$13,000 annually. I recognize that we are extremely privileged to be able to afford this, but many families aren't.

Beyond that, I'm giving an address today using spoken English, my main mode of communication, because I was able to receive these medical devices early enough into my diagnosis. If my access to hearing aids was delayed, the cost of speech therapy would be overwhelming-- more so than the cost of hearing aids themselves. We live in a hearing world, where many deaf people feel isolated. Especially since covid-19 necessitates the wearing of masks, I've been unable to rely on lip reading, and found myself relying more and more on my hearing aids. I will say it one more time: we live in a hearing world. Hearing should not be a "cosmetic feature", but a right for communication.

Looking into the future, I will be graduating high school on May 26, participating in a summer molecular biology internship at the University of Tennessee, and attending Rochester Institute of Technology with majors in Biomedical Sciences and Applied Spanish Language. After my undergraduate degree at RIT, to continue my education, I will pursue a MD through SUNY Upstate Medical University, where I have already secured

admission. My hearing aids have helped me access my education, make valuable connections with my teachers, and communicate with the right people to open doors for me.

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 needed them last year in AP Calculus class. 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.

I appreciate that Ohio House Bill 198 is going to address this critical need for Ohio's deaf and hard-of-hearing kids. And this is the reason I hope it will be passed, to benefit Ohioans like me.