

Dear Representative,

Thank you for considering this letter in support of HB 198, which would require private insurance plans to cover hearing aids for children up to age 21, with coverage for hearing aids up to \$2500/aid every 48 months. Right now, many commercial plans consider hearing aids “cosmetic” and therefore do not cover them. I support HB 198 because I am a practicing clinical audiologist working with pediatric patients and have seen the hardship this creates for parents.

I have had many parents not only have to experience the shock of being told their child has a hearing loss, but that the treatment to assist their child is not something covered by their insurance.

Many parents are unprepared and unable to afford hearing aids for their children when they are first diagnosed. Utilizing an insurance benefit for hearing aids would allow for children with hearing loss to be fit quickly with a product that will allow their speech/language to develop and keep them on target with their normally hearing peers.

Research has demonstrated that early intervention with hearing aids, has led to decreased financial impact with the child's overall medical and educational care.

It is so important that children with hearing loss to be fit early with hearing aids in order to develop language and begin to stimulate the auditory centers of the brain. Children need to identify sounds around them and help build auditory processing skills at a very early age.

Without hearing aids, a child with hearing loss may be effected educationally, socially and emotionally.

Insurance coverage for hearing aids is crucial not only for the child, but for the parents and caregivers to be able to begin the process of auditory habilitation without the worry of the financial burden.

Thank you for taking the time to review this bill and appreciate the value it will provide to our children and parents as well. I hope you will vote yes on HB 198.

Please contact me with any additional questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Gina Stillitano, Au.D.

Clinical Audiologist University Hospitals

Gina.Stillitano@UHhospitals.org Phone: 440-835-6160