

## HB 198 – Proponent Testimony by Lauren Durinka, Au.D.

### 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 Lauren Durinka and I am a Pediatric Audiologist at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. I support HB 198 because for the past 4 years, I have treated patients in the state of Ohio and I specialize in the care of patients from birth to 21 years of age with various types and degrees of hearing loss. One of my primary roles as a pediatric audiologist is to recommend and dispense hearing aids for children with hearing loss across the state of Ohio.

Hearing is critical to the development of speech, language and literacy skills. The vast majority of children born with hearing loss are born to normal hearing parents who use listening and spoken language to communicate. In order for a child with hearing loss to develop appropriate speech and language skills, hearing technology is often a necessity; a medical necessity. Currently many insurance companies do not consider hearing aids to be a medical necessity for children.

Our focus as pediatric audiologists is to provide the best care by providing our patients with access to the best hearing technology available. However, this becomes a hardship for many families in the state of Ohio as hearing aids are costly (typically ranging from \$1000-\$3000 per aid) and many families have little to no hearing aid coverage provided by their private insurance. It is important to recognize that the lifespan of a hearing aid is currently around 5 years, meaning that most children with hearing loss will require a minimum of 3-4 sets of hearing aids before they are 21 years of age. This further increases the financial burden that families of children with hearing loss face as their child grows.

Finally, it is important to understand that the cost of the hearing aids is not the only cost that a family of a child with hearing loss incurs. Often, these families are paying out of pocket for additional supplies, such as earmolds and batteries, and may also be paying for private therapies or other related medical expenses. To be able to reduce the financial burden of paying for hearing aids would be a huge relief for these families, allowing them to focus on the development of the child rather than how they are going to afford the next set of hearing aids.

You may also consider that several other states within the United States have passed similar legislature regarding this topic. The link below is a helpful resource for more information on other states that have already made this type of legislature a success:

[https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/issues/ha\\_reimbursement/](https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/issues/ha_reimbursement/)

I respectfully request that you consider supporting this bill to improve the current coverage standards for hearing aids across the state of Ohio. It would change the lives of so many children and families in the state.

Sincerely,

*Lauren V. Durinka, AuD*

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