

## Statement on Hearing Loss/Hearing Aids

We are here today to talk about kids and hearing loss. Nadia and I and are both professors at Kent State University in Northeast Ohio. Most importantly we are parents to Madeline. Madeline was diagnosed with hearing loss at age 2 and we have been on this journey ever since. She was born with a connexin 26 recessive gene that is responsible for about 10% of hearing loss in children. Madeline is an incredibly upbeat and happy go lucky kid that loves to be a big sister, learning math, swimming, and doing gymnastics. She is so much fun to be around and has an infectious laugh. This has been an eye opening and sometimes lonely journey.

Even though we are two professors at Kent State University with what we previously thought was pretty comprehensive health insurance. Finding out that our health insurance did not cover hearing aids and we needed to pay \$5000 twice now for hearing aids out of pocket was a big shock. I remember crying on the phone with the health insurance company as the agent explained hearing aids were considered cosmetic devices and I remember asking what 2 year old would choose to wear hearing aids as a cosmetic device.

It was shocking that something so developmentally necessary for a child to learn and communicate is treated the same as botox or plastic surgery. When we were getting our almost 3 year old daughter fitted for her hearing aids, the audiologist explained that we had 30 days to return them. I asked why would we return the hearing aids and she responded that sometimes people realize that they can't afford them you have 30 days to do so. It was heartbreaking to realize that so many families had to return them and have their children go without because of finances.

We are incredibly fortunate to have been able to pay for them but not everyone is so lucky. We are here to say how incredibly important hearing aids have been to our daughters development and growing up. All of the research shows how vital hearing is to learning and school outcomes. Madeline is now a thriving second grader at the top of her class in math and reading which has been possible because of the hearing aid technology she has access to. Let's make it so all kids have access!