

Dear Representative Weinstein,

I am so grateful for the support you've shown for HB198, Madeline's family and all of the families who can relate to their story. As you know, the proposed coverage is for hearing aids up to \$2500/aid every 48 months until a child reaches the age of 21. Right now, many commercial plans consider hearing aids "cosmetic" and therefore do not cover them. Synonyms of the word "cosmetic" include: aesthetic, decorative, beautifying, nonessential. None of those words describe what I consider to be hearing aids for anyone, especially children, and certainly teenagers. Two of my three children have hearing loss and need hearing aids. Hearing aids are NOT considered cosmetic to my family. They are necessary. Thank you for this opportunity to share my story and provide you with a first-hand testimony.

I would like you to meet my two daughters who were both diagnosed with hearing loss at birth. Amy is 10 and loves reading, art, math, and sports. She plays basketball and runs cross-country. She is a ray of sunshine and has one of the biggest hearts of anyone you will ever meet. She loves to write and tell stories. She is creative and funny and brings so much joy to our family. Amy wants to help people when she grows up and she loves the idea of becoming a teacher one day. Amy is also generally annoyed by her 7-year-old sister, Jillian. She also has hearing loss and wants to be just like her big sister, Amy. Jillian loves doing gymnastics, painting, riding her bike, jumping on the trampoline, and playing on the playground. She loves to be a helper, especially in the kitchen with cooking and baking. Jilly loves singing and says she wants to sing on a stage and be like Taylor Swift when she grows up. She is sassy and funny and loves to make people laugh. Our girls have the desires of any other kid their age. They know that their hearing aids make them "different" but, they do not let it stop them from learning, dreaming big and playing hard. For them, access to sound helps them to stay safe and better communicate daily with family, teachers, and friends. Hearing aids are not an accessory, they are necessary. They provide children equal access to education, and the ability to thrive in school. I am a firm believer in the importance of education and giving students the necessary tools and fair access to succeed as students and ultimately productive and positive members of society.

The thought of hearing aids being "cosmetic" for Amy and Jillian, a 10- and 7-year-old, does not make sense. When I think of "cosmetic" I think of choosing elective enhancements. I did not choose or elect to have children with a disability. I should not have to choose or elect to give them a medically approved solution to help them overcome that disability because I cannot afford it. Jillian also needs to wear glasses to see better, our insurance covers a portion of her glasses that need to be replaced every year. Why is her ability to hear less important than her ability to see? Our children rely on hearing aids for various reasons, none of which I consider being elective. For example:

- Safety- to hear people coming or going, hear cars coming and going, hear honking, hear their bus drivers, a knock at the door or their dog barking to get their attention.
- Communication- not just at home with family, but with teachers, therapists, coaches and teams, doctors, friends. I cannot imagine how frustrating it must feel to watch someone talking and not know what they are saying. Now, more than ever with the ability to read lips being compromised by mask wearing.
- Learning- hearing sounds when learning to read and learning phonics is foundational. Without that foundation, we are setting our children up for the potential to fall behind in all subjects. But, by providing early intervention and access to sound, we can set our kids up for success.

Hearing aids alone are expensive and should be replaced every 2-4 years. We are looking at each aid costing on average \$2500-\$4000 and both Amy and Jillian need an aid in each ear which means that to provide them the access to hear, I'm paying a minimum of \$5000+ per child (\$10,000+ total) in hearing aids alone. This does not include the hearing tests and ear molds that are also not covered. Nor does it include the cost of batteries which they go through quickly in my household because we are fortunate enough to be in a district that provides assistive listening technology. That technology is a system that directly links to their hearing aids and enhances the voices of their teachers and classmates, however it drains their batteries almost twice as fast. Now that my girls are school aged, in a year, we are averaging about 2 sets of ear molds for each daughter (8 total molds a year) and well over 100 batteries between the two of them. In a year that we must buy new hearing aids, we are expecting

to spend a minimum of \$11,000 - \$12,000 out of our own pocket for the aids, molds and batteries alone. Just for my daughters to have access to hearing!

Until recently, we qualified for BCMH assistance which was a huge help. My husband and I own a local technology company in Akron, Ohio. As business owners, we have a fluctuating income based on many factors including the economy. Because of that fluctuation, we no longer qualify for BCMH even though, our actual take-home income is not much different than it was when we did qualify.

We as a family are so grateful for the early interventions that have helped us get to the point we are today with our girls. When the girls were infants, thanks to the BCMH coverage, we were able to get them aided early without hesitation. It is because of the Regional Infant Hearing Program (which is no longer offered everywhere), Speech Language Pathologists, Audiologists, School Therapists, and staff that our girls can be in a general classroom among their peers today. I am so grateful for those resources and hopeful that other families have access to them. Today, at ages 7 and 10, our girls can tell us when they need to replace their batteries and when they are having a hard time hearing or need to eliminate background noise. Those moments of advocacy are the victories we celebrate as they gain confidence in who they are. But, while we are fortunate to be doing well, we share many days of frustration and tears over the pure exhaustion of hearing loss. It takes a lot of energy for a person with typical hearing to actively listen, imagine how hard it must be for someone who hears differently or not at all? We are still learning as a family how to navigate our world as a family that is part of the deaf and hard of hearing community. Our girls come home exhausted and often overwhelmed from listening fatigue. We are thankful for hearing aids and the boost that they provide our girls throughout the day. Even though they still have their fair share of challenges, the hearing aids provide them with more confidence in their ability to participate in school, sports and the community. My hope is that they will always have the hearing aids they need and that my husband and I will never have to choose whether to give that to them because of our financial circumstances.

I am so grateful for your time to read my letter. Like any parent, I am passionate about my children and providing them with the best I can. Our family is so grateful to be heard on such an important topic. We want to be able to see positive change because of the passing of HB 198. I hope you consider voting yes. These kids should not be held back because their parents cannot afford to buy them the hearing aids that show proven success in children as they learn and grow.

Thank you for considering this a priority. This is a chance for us to live up to the simple quote "Be the change you wish to see in the world" please help to be part of that change. Thank you again. This is something I feel passionately about and will gladly continue to share our story and experience, feel free to reach out anytime.

Nancy Larker  
697 Woodhaven Dr.  
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223  
614.530.2729  
[Nancy.larker@gmail.com](mailto:Nancy.larker@gmail.com)  
[nlarker@mys3tech.com](mailto:nlarker@mys3tech.com)