

**House Health Committee**  
**House Bill 198**  
**Written Proponent Testimony**  
**December 13, 2022**

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on House Bill 198. Additionally, thank you to Leader Russo and Representative Manchester for introducing this very important legislation that would help many families across our state. My name is Dr. Carrie Spangler, and I am writing to ask the committee to support HB 198, which would require commercial insurance plans to cover the cost of hearing aids up to \$2500 per ear every four years for children up to age 21, and favorable report this bill.

I have been practicing as an educational audiologist for 22 years. I also have a lifetime of personal experience living with hearing loss as I was diagnosed at the age of 4 and fitted with hearing aids. Most recently my hearing declined and as of November 2019, I have a cochlear implant for my left ear and continue to wear a hearing aid in my right ear.

Hearing is a critical sense that provides the foundation for listening, spoken language, reading, writing and academics in our hearing world. Hearing loss distorts and smears the acoustic signal negatively impacting access to listening, spoken language, reading, writing, and academics.

Statistically, 95% of children with hearing loss are born to parents with normal hearing.<sup>1</sup> Many families do want their child to communicate in their family's native language, whether English, Spanish, or any other verbal language. For a child with hearing loss to communicate with their families using spoken language, hearing aids are necessary.

In Ohio, many families experience significant financial hardship to give their child a fundamental need, hearing. The consequences of not providing the necessary hearing aid benefit are costly and detrimental to Ohio. Without hearing aids, children with HL will experience delayed speech and language acquisition, social-emotional or behavioral problems, and lags in academic achievement. With appropriate intervention and technology, children with hearing loss can be mainstreamed in their local elementary and secondary educational school settings.

Ohio's general assembly fully supports early hearing screening with the 2002 law that requires hearing screening for newborns in Ohio. If we identify babies with hearing loss, why would we deny a child the foundational right to hear? A child's ability to hear should not be determined on family income. It should be viewed as a fundamental right to the children of Ohio, especially when we have a mandated hearing screening program. To diagnose deafness and then fail to provide hearing intervention is morally and ethically unacceptable. Health insurances are not required to cover hearing aids, yet Medicaid and BCMH do. Ohio's families experience significant financial hardship of approximately \$5600 out of pocket expense for 2 hearing aids in order to give their child a fundamental need; hearing. Hearing aids also need to be replaced every 3-5 years and follow up for replacement parts, repairs and audiology visits are also not typically covered.

All children regardless of family's income should have the right to hear, grow, and reach their fullest potential. As an audiologist and as an individual who has lived my entire life with hearing loss, I depend on my hearing aid and cochlear implant in order to be a productive, contributing

Ohioan. Each morning I wake up to a quiet world. Without hearing devices, I would not be able to communicate with others and be gainfully employed in this hearing world.

Hearing aids are not cosmetic as many insurance companies say. Insurance companies also claim they are not medically necessary, and I would argue that they are. Necessary for safety (hearing cars, sirens, people calling my name), daily functioning, communication, and employment in the hearing world. I understand firsthand the importance of hearing aids and Ohio's children deserve to basic right to hear. On behalf of Ohio's children with HL, I ask Ohio's lawmakers to support HB 198.

More than two dozen states have passed legislation requiring insurance coverage for hearing aids for children. Data from those states shows that the increase in the premium per member per health plan has been minimal to help cover these life-changing devices and services (the increase ranges from five to 39-cents per member per health plan).

I strongly ask you to support HB 198. Thank you for taking the time to consider my position on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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