

**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. Elizabeth Striegl 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 am an educational audiologist serving 17 districts across 3 counties in the state of Ohio. I work with children ages 3 to graduation with hearing loss and ensuring access in school to education regardless of hearing differences. Many of my districts are lower income, and I have more students that I think is acceptable who are unable to obtain access to hearing aids. Imagine sitting in class all day as a child with earplugs in. The level of emotional stress, educational fatigue, and social isolation for these students can be immense. Many parents are simply unable to obtain hearing aids for their child due to financial difficulties. The goal of education is to help each child achieve their full potential with the idea that eventually they will graduate and be a contributing member of society, one of the best ways we can achieve this to help ensure ALL children have access to hearing aids through House Bill 198

Approximately three in 1,000 babies are born with permanent hearing loss, making hearing loss one of the most common birth defects in America. Many families whose children are identified with a hearing loss at their infant hearing screening cannot afford the price of hearing aids for their child; the Better Hearing Institute sets this number at one out of five parents (22%). For children, hearing is the key to learning spoken language, performing academically, and engaging socially. Research shows the annual average education expenditure per student for a child with hearing loss is more than twice that for a child without a disability and the estimated lifetime economic cost of hearing loss in children is more than \$400,000 per child. These costs can be avoided if a child is identified early and given appropriate educational, medical, and audiological services.

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).

Again, I encourage you to support HB 198. Thank you for taking the time to consider my position on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Striegl, Au.D., CCC-A
339 Miami Ave Elyria OH, 44035
412-901-4042