

**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 Tina Marks, AuD, and I am writing to ask the committee to support HB 198 (Madeline's Law), 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.

As president of The Ohio Academy of Audiology, representing approximately 190 hearing healthcare professionals within the state, I cannot express to you enough how important this legislation is to the children of Ohio. As an audiologist for the past 17 years, I have heard from my colleagues that practice in pediatrics, about families that can't afford to purchase devices for their child with hearing impairment due to lack of insurance coverage. They delay treatment and at times are lost to follow up because the treatment option for them is cost prohibitive.

Approximately three in 1,000 babies are born with permanent hearing loss. Many families whose children are identified with a hearing loss at birth through infant hearing screening are unable to pay the significant financial burden of hearing aids for their child. Without access to sound, children with hearing loss are at risk for significant speech and language delays, social and emotional behavioral problems, and reading, writing, and academic success will be substantially impacted.

More than two dozen states have passed legislation requiring insurance coverage for hearing aids for children. Data suggests the annual average education expenditure per student for a child with hearing loss is more than twice that for a child without a disability. The lifetime economic cost is estimated to exceed more than \$400,000 per child. Data from those states who have required insurance coverage for hearing aids for children show that the increase in the health plan premium per member has been minimal; increased costs range from 5 to 39 cents per member to provide a life-changing intervention for these children and their families. Research has provided us with significant data to support that children who are identified with hearing loss early and provided with the appropriate audiological, medical, and educational services can develop language on par with their hearing peers and these costs can be substantially reduced.

Again, I, and the audiologists of Ohio, encourage you to support HB 198. Thank you for taking the time to consider our position on this important legislation.

Sincerely

*Tina Marks, AuD*

Tina Marks, AuD  
Ohio Academy of Audiology President