

House Bill 152- Proponent Testimony

Ohio House Insurance Committee: Carrie Spangler, Au.D., CCC-A

Consumer (Individual who is deaf/hard of hearing) and Lead Educational Audiologist at Summit Educational Service Center

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Chairman Lampton, Vice-Chairman Barhorst, Ranking Member Miranda and members of the House Insurance Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and speak in support of HB 152 (Madeline's Law) which would require health benefit plans to provide coverage for hearing aids and related services for Ohioans under 22 years of age.

My name is Dr. Carrie Spangler and I am an educational audiologist for the Summit Educational Service Center serving children with auditory needs ages 3 to graduation. I have been practicing as an audiologist for 24 years. I also have over 45 years 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 a hearing aid for 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, academics, and workforce development.

Statistically, 95% of children with hearing loss are born to parents with typical hearing. 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 a necessity.

The consequences of not providing the necessary hearing aid benefit are costly and detrimental to Ohio. Without hearing aids, children who are deaf/hard of hearing 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. When children are not identified and do not receive necessary amplification and intervention, special education for 1 child with hearing loss costs schools an additional \$420,000 and has a lifetime cost of approximately \$1 million dollars per individual. Not giving children the foundation to hear, communicate, and gain literacy skills early will also impact workforce development. Statistics by the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes in 2017 indicated that only 49% of deaf individuals were employed in Ohio compared to 73% of hearing individuals.

Ohio's general assembly fully supports early hearing detection 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? Health insurances are not required to cover hearing aids. Ohio's families experience significant financial hardship of approximately \$5000 or more out of pocket expense for 2 hearing aids 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 a hearing aid and cochlear implant, 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 the basic right to hear. On behalf of Ohio's children with HL, I ask Ohio's lawmakers to support HB 152.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.