

Chairman Lampton, Vice-Chairman Barhorst, Ranking Member Miranda and members of the House Insurance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony 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 Monica C. Schneider. I am a Professor at Miami University and the mother of two boys: Mitchell and Harrison Abes. Harrison was born in 2011 and immediately diagnosed with Down syndrome. However, we do not want his diagnosis to limit him. Our vision for Harrison is that he lives an independent, productive, and fulfilling life. We expect him to graduate from high school and engage in post-secondary education. We expect him to hold a job, pay taxes, and live independently as an adult. We expect him to be a good member of his community.

These are the same lofty goals that we have for our typically-developing son, Mitchell. But, as you might anticipate, achieving these goals looks a little different for Harrison. Down syndrome is not Harrison's only challenge. He has GI issues, he is hypothyroid, he has sleep apnea and ear infections, and he sees a pulmonologist for trouble breathing when he gets sick. He wears glasses. He sees occupational therapists to help his fine motor skills for things like dressing and writing. He sees physical therapy to help him learn to jump, manage stairs, and improve his core strength. He goes to a speech therapist to improve his communication and he uses a communication device to express his wants and needs.

On top of all of this, several years ago, we found that holes in Harrison's ear drums were causing moderate to severe hearing loss. Harrison's ENT and Audiology team recommended hearing aids. As a state employee with excellent insurance, I expected that these devices would be covered. They were not. Our bills that year were astronomical. In addition to our \$6000 out of pocket maximum, we racked up additional bills from the cost of Harrison's hearing aids, hearing aid molds, and appointments to test the effectiveness of the hearing aids. Harrison's unique support needs made these appointments all the more crucial – he had a hard time keeping his hearing aid molds in and sometimes he damaged them. It was difficult for him to understand how to complete a hearing test. As a result, we needed more frequent appointments, which cost more. While the holes in Harrison's ear drums have now closed enough to restore his hearing, he is always at risk for hearing loss in the future.

Harrison is a loving son, brother, cousin, nephew and grandson. He loves to read, dance, swim, snuggle under a soft blanket, listen to music, and walk outside. We have lofty goals for Harrison, as any parent would for their child. We have not wavered from these dreams. Without our ability to afford hearing aids, the many audiology visits he needed, and the hearing aid molds, there is no way he would be on the path to achieve these goals. But many families can't afford these things. These costs add up, especially for families in the Down syndrome community where hearing loss is not the only challenge. Having hearing aids as part of our insurance coverage would make a big difference. I therefore urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Monica C. Schneider

Montgomery, Ohio