

Witness testimony in support of HB 152 (Madeline's Law)

From Kathleen Palmer

Cincinnati, Ohio (this is the full text of the statement I intended to submit)

I am the mother of a 16-year-old boy with Down syndrome and moderate hearing loss; we live outside Cincinnati. My son, like many kids with Ds, has a long history of ear infections, and has had 10 sets of PE tubes. The damage created a perforation that cost him a bit of hearing in one ear, to the point that he could not hear his teachers in class and missed many of the words family and friends were saying to him. Getting him fitted for a hearing aid was incredibly costly (more than \$2k), and all out of pocket. And that was just for *ONE* hearing aid. Children outgrow them, or lose them, and many kids need devices for both ears. The cost then increases exponentially over months and years. It is critically important that children with hearing loss get medical and audiological intervention, and the necessary equipment so that hearing is improved, particularly for speech development. Investing in children's hearing and speech puts them on a much better path to meaningful inclusion in school, and later, jobs and fulfilling lives in their Ohio communities. Even if this bill were not the right thing to do morally (and it is), it is the right thing to do pragmatically, in terms of giving kids with hearing loss a much better shot at being contributors to society. My son dreams of owning his own restaurant at some point (learning to cook amazing gluten free food was the silver lining of a celiac disease diagnosis). But restaurant owners need to be able to communicate clearly, and that would not have been possible without a lot of audiological intervention and speech therapy. If Ohio lawmakers want to stay true to their promise to ensure that the interests of ALL Ohioans are represented, they cannot leave children with hearing loss behind in this way. Parents of children with disabilities are used to forgoing vacations, new cars, nicer homes, and other luxuries to cover the cost of their children's medical care. But at some point, it would be wonderful to feel as though we were not bearing the entire weight of this ourselves; that the people charged with protecting the most vulnerable people in Ohio really felt the weight of that responsibility and were earnest about finding solutions to problems like the cost of healthcare. Passing Madeline's Law would go a long way toward that. Thank you for your time.