



Ohio School Speech Pathology Educational Audiology Coalition

**House Insurance Committee
House Bill 152
Proponent Testimony
June 7, 2023**

Chairman Lampton, Vice Chair Barhorst, Ranking Member Miranda, and members of the House Insurance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on House Bill 152. Thank you also to Representative Weinstein and Representative Young for introducing this very important piece of legislation. My name is Kelly Metcalf-Lattime and I am the President of the Ohio School Speech Pathology Educational Audiology Coalition (OSSPEAC). Since 1994, our organization of school based Educational Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists has been dedicated to providing support for Ohio's children with speech, language and hearing disabilities. On behalf of our organization, I am urging you to request that the committee support House Bill 152. OSSPEAC's members know first hand how devastating the effects of untreated hearing loss have on the academic, social and future employment prospects of children who experience a permanent congenital or acquired hearing loss. Fortunately much can be done to prevent these deleterious effects by providing children with early access to sound using hearing aid technology. House Bill 152 will allow families who cannot otherwise afford the cost of hearing aids with a necessary technology for overcoming the effects of untreated hearing loss.

Approximately 3 of 1,000 children in this country are born with permanent hearing loss. Admirably, Ohio has passed legislation requiring that newborns be screened for hearing loss so that the disability can be identified early. Once the hearing loss has been identified, however, time is of the essence. Early access to sound is critical for a child's spoken language development. Spoken language is the foundation for later developing reading and written language skills.

Opponents of House Bill 152 have cited cost as a concern. House Bill 152 would require commercial insurance plans to cover the cost of hearing aids up to \$2500 per ear every forty eight months for children up to age 21. One in five of families are simply not able to afford this cost according to the Better Hearing Institute.

Over two dozen states have passed legislation requiring that insurers provide coverage for childrens' hearing aids. The increased costs in the premium per member per health plan have ranged from five to thirty nine cents per member per health plan. This cost pales in comparison to the annual average education expenditure per student for a child with hearing loss, which is over twice as much as that of a child without a disability. The estimated lifetime economic cost of hearing loss in children is over \$400,000 per child. This is a staggering cost for both families and Ohio's economy.

OSSPEAC strongly encourages you to support House Bill 152. We appreciate your consideration of our position on legislation that is critical for the success of children with hearing loss. We are looking forward to the day when House Bill 152 becomes Madeline's Law.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kelly Metcalf-Lattime
OSSPEAC President
205 Glendale Street
LaGrange, OH 44050
(888) 258-1032

