

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. Additionally, thank you to Representative Weinstein and Representative Young for introducing this very important legislation that would help many families across our state. My name is Jill Huizenga, and I am writing to ask the committee to support HB 152, 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 favorably report this bill.

I have been a pediatric audiologist for over ten years and have personally seen the impact that early detection of hearing loss and early intervention with hearing devices as well as speech and listening therapy can have on not just a child, but an entire family. There is always grief that comes with a diagnosis of hearing loss as families adjust their expectations of what their child's and family's life will look like. This law would remove the added financial burden and help families in their journey to ensure their child has every opportunity to succeed.

Approximately three in 1,000 babies are born with permanent hearing loss, making hearing loss one of the most common birth defects in America. Greater than 90% of babies born with hearing loss are born to parents who have normal hearing and who use listening and spoken language to communicate. Often, they generally desire for their children to be able to communicate easily within their family and community, and access to sound is the foundation for developing spoken language. Many families whose children are identified with a hearing loss at their infant hearing screening cannot afford the price of hearing aids for their child; the Better Hearing Institute sets this number at one out of five parents (22%). Even for families who have the means for one set of hearing aids, the long term cost can be daunting for families; knowing that this is a significant expense they will have to make regularly throughout their child's life as all electronic devices have a limited lifespan and technology improves over time.

For children, hearing is the key to learning spoken language, performing academically, and engaging socially. Research shows the annual average education expenditure per student for a child with hearing loss is more than twice that for a child without a disability and the estimated lifetime economic cost of hearing loss in children is more than \$400,000 per child. These costs can be avoided if a child is identified early and given appropriate educational, medical, and audiological services.

More than two dozen states have passed legislation requiring insurance coverage for hearing aids for children. Data from those states shows that the increase in the premium per member per health plan has been minimal to help cover these life-changing devices and services (the increase ranges from five to 39-cents per member per health plan).

Again, I encourage you to support HB 152. Thank you for taking the time to consider my position on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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