

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 Ashley Dainton 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 an audiologist for six years, and I currently work as a pediatric audiologist in Columbus, OH. I have seen the benefit of hearing aid coverage through commercial insurance for children with hearing loss at my previous workplace in Massachusetts. I care about this legislation as hearing aids can be a crucial component to early intervention/intervention services, including but not limited to supporting speech and language development. Furthermore, access to hearing aids should be equal among all families.

Approximately three in 1,000 babies are born with permanent hearing loss, making hearing loss one of the most common birth defects in America. 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%). 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,

Ashley Dainton, Au.D., CCC-A, F-AAA