

Hello, my name is JD Podojil and I am in 5th grade in Strongsville. I would like to thank you all for bringing House Bill 152 to the Senate Insurance Committee. I am here to share my testimony and why I feel hearing aids are very important, not cosmetic, and need to be covered by private insurance.

I had mumps when I was 4, even though I was vaccinated, I was sick in the hospital. A couple years later the school nurse, Nurse Carol, tested my hearing and I failed three times. That's when I found out I had bilateral hearing loss, from having mumps. We saw an ENT doctor and an audiologist every 6 months, and sadly my hearing declined, so I had to be fitted with bilateral hearing aids in second grade. We decided to rename them "J-Bucks". It just sounded cooler, J short for JD and Bucks since we are Ohio State fans and they are expensive. For today I will call them hearing aids though.

My parents told me some people had to wear glasses to see and I had to wear these to hear, and what a difference it made! I remember sitting in the office, I looked up, I could hear the vents in the ceiling so clear when she put them on me. I also didn't have to sit in the front of the class, try to read lips, and I could hear people talk even when they wore masks. I wasn't exhausted when I got home from school, it is tiring struggling to listen all day. Also, another cool thing is they hooked right up to my chrome book, pretty techy right? Besides hearing clearly, my grades really soared! I am proof that children who are able to get hearing aids improve academically.

Did you know we hear with our brains, not our ears? The ears are just a way to get the sound to our brain, and when there is no exposure to sound early in your life, your brain begins to rewire itself and vision takes over. There are studies that show that hearing aids can prevent further hearing loss from occurring. That's because sounds stimulate the auditory cortex, which helps it's ability to interpret incoming sounds, when this is absent, tissues atrophy. I think of it as exercising my hearing center to keep it in shape, just like we practice sports or an instrument to get better.

Unfortunately, we had to pay with a credit card all at once to get a percentage off through Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland. It was still \$4000! I also remember my mom looking mad when looking through bills and wondering why we had to pay hundreds of dollars at my 6 month hearing checks, when we had insurance. They found out that not only hearing aids weren't covered, but also all the follow up hearing tests, times when they needed fixed, the FM system, and for chargers for home plus at school. There is only one time the company where we bought them will replace them, or we would need to purchase another pair. They do not count towards our deductible either, which I really don't understand all that! I have been very responsible with mine, I almost jumped in the pool and got in the shower once, and have broken a few wires. As you can tell, most kids and expensive devices don't mix, another reason they are needed every 2-3 years as we grow!

I have heard my parents talk about other families, that delayed braces or buying new hearing aids because they can't afford both. It makes me sad for them since I know how much they helped me. They are delaying their speech, learning, safety, athletic ability and just talking to their friends. Then society may have to pay for speech therapy or an improvement plan in school. It makes me sad for my older brothers in college that we can't use that money for them to pay for college.

There are several YouTube videos that simulate the different types of hearing loss and even what it sounds like to wear hearing aids. Please check them out so you understand how it feels.

In conclusion, I want to thank my doctors, excellent audiologists at school and at UH and teacher of the deaf, who check on me at school and help manage my 504 plan with my awesome teachers. I would like to be an audiologist when I grow up, so I can help others like they have helped me. So please members of the Senate Insurance Committee, let me help others today by being an advocate for insurance companies to cover kids hearing aids, or as I call mine "J-Bucks".