

## **Senate Insurance Committee**

### **House Bill 152**

#### **Proponent Testimony**

**November 20, 2024**

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Lang, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Insurance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on House Bill 152. Additionally, thank you to Representative Weinstein for introducing this very important legislation that would help many families across our state. My name is Elizabeth Striegl 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 work as an educational audiologist in 3 counties across Ohio and see first hand the difficulties families and children face when trying to access hearing healthcare. For my students who are unable to financially access hearing aids they are set up for limited success compared to their typical hearing peers. These children will be delayed in learning, reading, and long-term success which will overall impact their long-term job and earning potential. No child should fall behind in school simply because they cannot hear what they need to access the curriculum. Over 30% of a school day learning is auditory, and these children deserve access to what they need to hear both in school and in the home.

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,

Elizabeth Striegl

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