

HB 152 – Proponent Testimony by Chloe Vaughan, AuD

House Health Committee

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 Chloe Vaughan 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.

My name is Chloe Vaughan and I am a Pediatric Audiologist at Nationwide Children's Hospital and OhioHealth in Columbus, Ohio. I support HB 152 because for the past 5 years, I have treated patients in the state of Ohio and I specialize in the care of patients from birth to 21 years of age with various types and degrees of hearing loss. One of my primary roles as a pediatric audiologist is to recommend and dispense hearing aids for children with hearing loss across the state of Ohio.

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%). Hearing aids are costly (typically ranging from \$1500-\$4000 per aid) and many families have little to no hearing aid coverage provided by their private insurance, as insurance companies have deemed hearing aids for children as “not a medical necessity” I have had patients and families who hear the words “thousands of dollars” and “not covered by your insurance” and who then decide that their child will have to go without hearing aids, limiting their access to spoken language and impairing their performance in school and their trajectory in life.

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.

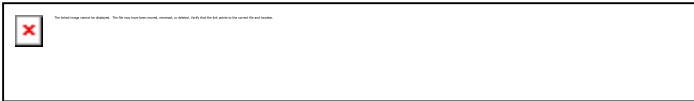
Finally, hearing aids are not the only financial hardship faced by families of children with hearing loss. Children with hearing loss may also need private therapies or other related medical expenses. Lifting the burden of paying for hearing aids would allow them to focus on the development of their child rather than worrying about how they are going to afford the next set of hearing aids.

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). The link below is a helpful resource for more information on other states that have already made this type of legislature a success.

https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/issues/ha_reimbursement/

I respectfully request that you consider supporting this bill to improve the current commercial insurance coverage standards for hearing aids across the state of Ohio. It would change the lives of so many children and families in the state.

Sincerely,



Chloe Vaughan, AuD, PASC
614-355-6819
Chloe.vaughan@nationwidechildrens.org