

**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 Lauren Durinka, AuD, PASC 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 am the Evidence Based Coordinator and also a Pediatric Audiologist at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. I also hold the Pediatric Audiology Specialty Certification from the American Board of Audiology. I support HB 152 because for the past 7.5 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. Hearing is critical to the development of speech, language and literacy skills. The vast majority of children born with hearing loss are born to normal hearing parents who use listening and spoken language to communicate. In order for a child with hearing loss to develop appropriate speech and language skills, hearing technology is often a necessity; a medical necessity. Currently many insurance companies do not consider hearing aids to be a medical necessity for children.

Our focus as pediatric audiologists is to provide the best care by providing our patients with access to the best hearing technology available. However, this becomes a hardship for many families in the state of Ohio as hearing aids are costly (typically ranging from \$2000-\$4000 per aid) and many families have little to no hearing aid coverage provided by their private insurance. It is important to recognize that the lifespan of a hearing aid is currently around 5 years, meaning that most children with hearing loss will require a minimum of 3-4 sets of hearing aids before they are 21 years of age. This further increases the financial burden that families of children with hearing loss face as their child grows.

Finally, it is important to understand that the cost of the hearing aids is not the only cost that a family of a child with hearing loss incurs. Often, these families are paying out of pocket for additional supplies, such as earmolds and batteries, and may also be paying for private therapies or other related medical expenses. To be able to reduce the financial burden of paying for hearing aids would be a huge relief for these families, allowing them to focus on the development of the child rather than 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).

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

Sincerely,

Lauren Durinka, AuD, PASC  
Evidence Based Practice Coordinator  
Pediatric Audiologist  
88 Gibson Place  
Westerville, OH 43081  
513-600-1344