

**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 Angela Gruenberg 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 a Clinical Audiologist at the Cleveland Clinic and I am the current President of the Ohio Academy of Audiology. I have been an audiologist since 2017. I care about this legislation because untreated hearing loss can have significant negative effects on individuals lives, especially young children in the developmental years. Research has connection untreated hearing loss to issues with language development, lower reading levels and poorer performance in schools. As individuals age untreated hearing loss can lead to cognitive decline, memory issues, social isolation, greater risk of falls, etc. Currently, Medicare lists hearing aids as a cosmetic service. Based on the above information I am sure you can see that this is not a cosmetic issue, and we can agree no one wants to wear hearing aids to improve their cosmetic appearance. These devices can connect children to their classrooms, their families, to learning through the spoken word and so much more. They are computers that are worn on the patient's ears. They can be very costly for patients and typically need to be replaced every 3-5 years. A lot of times hearing loss in children can be genetic and then families may have multiple children who suffer from hearing loss and need hearing aids. Most devices cost between \$4,000-\$5,000 for a set and if a family needs multiple sets for multiple children with hearing loss this can be a very difficult situation. We have the opportunity to help so many children and families in the state of Ohio in a positive way.

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,

Angela Gruenberg, AuD, CCC/A

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