

**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 Dr. Denise Testa, CCC/A, FAAA, ADA 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 have been an audiologist for over 30 years and have worked with infants through adults my entire career. I am currently in my own private practice and still am fitting children, teens and young adults with amplification. There are difficult discussions with parents talking about amplification and the cost associated with the devices. Parents are typically unprepared for the added personal expense since their insurance companies do not have any coverage for the devices.

My daughter was diagnosed with progressive hearing loss in 2019 at the age of 15 and was fit with binaural amplification at that time. My husband and I were also the parents not prepared for additional expenses, and it would have been a blessing to have insurance coverage at the time. We were both emotionally and financially a wreck with the sudden diagnosis of the progressive nature of her loss and the added expenses to our budget. She was recently fit in October 2024 with her 2nd set of devices due to the decline of her hearing and the age of her first set of aids.

I have both a personal and professional connection to this issue and support House Bill 152.

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,

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