

Good afternoon, and thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

What's it like to have normal hearing? I myself can't answer that question.

My name is Ellie Warren and I am currently a senior at the Rochester Institute of Technology. You last heard from me 2 years ago when I was still a college sophomore, and then before that while I was a high school senior, and before that still while I was a high school junior. A few things have changed, but my hearing loss has not. I was first diagnosed with moderate bilateral hearing loss when I was 3 ½ years old, and I have worn hearing aids ever since. My hearing loss is a part of who I am, and I will wear hearing aids for the rest of my life.

I'm sure you'll hear about the numbers-- the costs of having hearing aids, audiology visits, speech therapy, and more, but it's easy to distance ourselves. They're just numbers, right?

Let me rephrase that question by giving you some of my numbers: I have 3 siblings, and 2 of them have hearing loss too. My sister, Tess, is in 12th grade and just returned from a year abroad in Belgium through Rotary youth exchange, while my brother, Toby, just started his freshman (9th grade) year and continues to enjoy wrestling. Finally, I'm in my senior year of college (16th grade for anyone keeping track) and in addition to winning an award for being in the top 1% of my college and completing a semester abroad in Chile, I am involved as a resident advisor in the dorms, president of the beekeeping club, instructor for the latin rhythm dance club, and a student coordinator for no voice zone.

My family includes 3 kids who wear hearing aids and the costs of audiology services rise to over \$13,000 annually. I recognize that we are extremely privileged to be able to afford this, but so many families aren't.

Beyond that, I've given my previous addresses using spoken English, my main mode of communication, because I was able to receive these *medical devices* early enough in my diagnosis. If my access to hearing aids was delayed, the cost of speech therapy would have been overwhelming-- more so than the cost of hearing aids themselves. Whether you realize it or not, we live in a hearing world, where many deaf people, including myself, feel isolated. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the wearing of masks, I've been unable to rely on lip reading, and found myself relying more and more on my hearing aids. The ability to hear is not a "cosmetic feature," but a medical necessity.

Looking into the future, I'm planning to graduate this May from the Rochester Institute of Technology with 2 majors in Biomedical Sciences and Applied Spanish Language. After my undergraduate degree at RIT, I will continue my education by pursuing an MD through SUNY Upstate Medical University, where I have a seat in the class of 2029. My hearing aids have helped me access my education, make valuable connections with my teachers, and communicate with the right people to open these doors to opportunities.

My hearing loss is a part of who I am, and I will always need to be able to access sound. I *needed* hearing aids when I was 3 ½ to avoid speech delays. I *needed* them when I was 6 and played soccer. I *needed* them when I was 13 and took engineering classes. I *needed* them during high school for Mock Trial and AP Calculus. I *need* them as the president of the beekeeping club and resident advisor during my undergrad. I will *need* them as a medical student, resident, and when I'm a doctor. Access to sound is access to my community, my school, my employers, and hopefully, one day, my patients.

5 years ago when this bill was first introduced, I would have been able to benefit from it. 2 years ago, I still would have been able to benefit from it. Even 1 year ago, I would have been able to benefit from it. This year I turned 21. I will no longer personally be able to benefit from this bill, even if it were passed today.

My sister is 18, she has an extremely bright future and still has 3 more years to be able to benefit from this crucial legislation. Ohioans can't wait any longer-- I implore you to give my sister, brother, and other Ohio children the same access to sound and invaluable opportunities I have had by passing Ohio HB 152.