

Senate Insurance Committee
House Bill 152
Proponent Testimony
November 20, 2024

Consumer (Individual who is deaf/hard of hearing) and Educational Audiologist at the Summit Educational Service Center

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Lang, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Insurance Committee; Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and speak in support of HB 152 (Madeline's Law) which would require health benefit plans to provide coverage for hearing aids and related services for Ohioans under 22 years of age.

My name is Dr. Carrie Spangler. I am an educational audiologist employed by the Summit Educational Service Center serving children with auditory needs ages 3 years through high school graduation. I have been practicing as an audiologist for 25 years. I also have over 47 years of personal experience living with hearing loss and fitted with my first pair of hearing aids at the age of four. In 2019, I experienced a decline in hearing and underwent surgery for a cochlear implant. I currently have a cochlear implant in my left ear and utilize a hearing aid in my right ear.

Hearing is a critical sense that provides the foundation for listening, spoken language, reading, writing, academics, and workforce development in this hearing world. Hearing loss will distort and smear the acoustic signal negatively impacting access to listening, spoken language, reading, writing, academics, and workforce development.

Statistically, 95% of children who are deaf/hard of hearing are born to parents with typical hearing. Many families do want their child to communicate in their family's native language, whether English, Spanish, or any other verbal language. For a child with hearing loss to communicate with their family using spoken language, hearing aids are a necessity.

The consequences of not providing the necessary hearing aid benefit are costly and detrimental to Ohio. Without hearing aids, children who are deaf/hard of hearing will experience delayed speech and language acquisition, social-emotional or behavioral problems, and lags in academic achievement. With appropriate intervention and technology, children who are deaf/hard of hearing can be mainstreamed in their local school. When children are not identified and do not receive necessary amplification and interventions, special education for 1 child with hearing loss costs schools an additional \$420,000 and has a lifetime cost of approximately \$1 million dollars per individual. Not giving the foundation to hear, communicate, and gain literacy skills early will also impact workforce development. Statistics by the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes in 2022 indicated that only 52% of deaf individuals were employed in Ohio compared to 73% of hearing individuals.

Ohio's general assembly fully supports early hearing detection with the 2002 law that requires hearing screening for newborns in Ohio. If we identify babies with hearing loss, why would we deny a child the foundational right to hear? Health insurances are not required to cover hearing aids. Ohio's families experience significant financial hardship of approximately \$5000 or more out of pocket expense for 2 hearing aids to give their child a fundamental need- hearing. Hearing aids also need to be replaced every 3-5 years and follow-up for replacement parts, repairs, and audiology visits are also not typically covered. All children regardless of family's income should have the right to hear, grow, and reach their fullest potential.

As an deaf/hard of hearing audiologist and as an individual who has lived my entire life with hearing loss, I depend on my hearing aid and cochlear implant in order to be a productive, contributing Ohioan. Each morning I wake up to a quiet world. Without a hearing aid and cochlear implant, I would not be able to communicate with others and be gainfully employed in this hearing world.

Hearing aids are not cosmetic as many insurance companies say. Insurance companies also claim they are not medically necessary, and I would argue that they are. Necessary for safety (hearing cars, sirens, people calling my name), daily functioning, communication, and employment in the hearing world. I understand firsthand the importance of hearing aids and Ohio's children deserve the basic right to hear. On behalf of Ohio's children with hearing loss, I ask Ohio's lawmakers to pass this important legislation.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.