

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 Ashley Boggs 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 doctor of audiology who was born and raised in Ohio. While obtaining my degree and for the first few years after I became an audiologist, I had the opportunity to work in three other states before I moved back to my home state. I've seen firsthand how early access to hearing healthcare for children with hearing loss produces better developmental, academic, and social outcomes in addition to improved overall quality of life. I currently work as an educational audiologist in several local school districts in Northwestern Ohio with children of varying socioeconomic statuses and access to healthcare. In my experience, the cost of hearing aids is one of the biggest barriers for my students to obtain treatment for their hearing loss. Many working-class families simply cannot afford the cost of the treatment despite wanting what is best for their children. Without treatment for their hearing loss, many of these students struggle with communicating with peers, family, and other adults. Since language is the key to literacy, these children are at an automatic disadvantage to their peers who do not have hearing loss and are more likely to fall behind academically. I believe that all of Ohio's children deserve to be set up for success to be happy, healthy, and productive members of society and this bill is a great leap in that direction.

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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