

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 Alicia Gonzalez, AuD 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 pediatric audiologist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. In my role at Cincinnati Children's I evaluate, dispense, and manage hearing aids for children with hearing loss. Unfortunately, hearing aids are very rarely a covered benefit under commercial insurance. Due to this, the cost of hearing aids is something that is discussed and considered in detail when a child is getting their first set of hearing aids or when their current set is broken and outside of a repair warranty. I have had parents express that they cannot afford hearing aids, yet they will find a way because they know their child needs them to hear, develop spoken language, and excel in the classroom. It breaks my heart that families are burdened by the cost of hearing aids and insurance coverage would make a world of a difference for these families.

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,
Alicia Gonzalez, AuD
(248) 719-3682
4407 Redmont Ave Deer Park, OH 45236