

**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 Rebecca Belt, 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 a pediatric audiologist at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, OH for the past 20 years. One of my primary roles is to recommend and dispense hearing aids for children with hearing loss across the state of Ohio. Our focus as pediatric audiologists is to provide the best care by providing our patients with access to the best hearing technology available. However, this becomes a hardship for many families in the state of Ohio as hearing aids are costly (typically ranging from \$2000-\$3000 per aid), and many families have little to no hearing aid coverage provided by their private insurance. It is important to recognize that the lifespan of a hearing aid is currently around 4 years, meaning that most children with hearing loss will require a minimum of 3-4 sets of hearing aids before they are 21 years of age. This further increases the financial burden that families of children with hearing loss face as their child grows. I care about this legislation as I feel all children with varying degrees of hearing loss should have access to appropriate healthcare, specifically hearing aids that are medically necessary and critical to the development of speech, language and literacy skills.

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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