

May 10, 2021

Dear Chairman Lipps,

My name is Abigail Simon, and I am from Columbus, Ohio. I am writing to ask the House Health Committee to support HB 198, which would require commercial insurance plans to cover the cost of hearing aids up to \$2500/ear every four years for children up to age 21.

I am a second-year student in the Doctor of Audiology program (AuD) at the Ohio State University. I care about this legislation because as a student and clinician I recognize the intense financial burden placed on families with children with hearing loss. The current system does not promote equity in access to care and creates extreme financial strain for lower income families. Families recognize the vital importance of early intervention with hearing aids but cannot afford the cost of thousands of dollars per hearing aid device, in addition to routine maintenance.

In academic courses I have learned that permanent hearing loss is one of the most common birth defects in the United States, with a prevalence of approximately 3 in 1,000 babies. Early intervention is now the standard of care, but the Better Hearing Institute has published work demonstrating that approximately 1 out of every 5 parents says they cannot afford the price of hearing aids for their child. This means that 20% of children with a demonstrated permanent hearing loss do not have access to amplified speech and sounds.

Countless research articles have provided evidence regarding the importance of hearing aids for childhood spoken language and communicative development, academic performance, social engagement with peers, etc. Stated bluntly, if a child does not have auditory access to the world around them, then they do not have the same developmental trajectory as their peers with normal hearing and are more likely to fall behind and fall through the cracks. Even a child with “mild” hearing loss does not have full access to the spoken world around them and this will have negative impacts on their academic and personal development.

The state of Ohio currently promotes an unjust system for hearing aids that places significant financial strain on lower income families and in turn negatively impacts the academic development of children with permanent hearing loss. Already, 24 other states – Kentucky, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Utah, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maryland, Colorado, New Mexico, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Missouri, New Jersey, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Delaware, and Oregon – have passed legislation required insurance coverage for hearing aids for children. I believe it is a critical public health measure that the state of Ohio follows in these footsteps and vote to pass HB 198. All children, and



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their families, deserve equal access to hearing aid coverage and the many benefits that result.

Again, I encourage you to support HB 198. Thank you for taking the time to consider my position in support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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