

Legislative Committee, House Insurance and Financial Services Committee,
Oct 18, 2023

Dear Justin Easter, Clerk for the House Insurance & Financial Services Committee,

As a person who has worn hearing aids since the age of 4, I strongly recommend that this committee pass both the HB 4944 Bill for Insurance coverage for children and the companion bill, HB 4963 for necessary related hearing services and devices for children. With no known family history of hearing loss, imagine my parent's surprise to discover that not only was my brother deaf but I was hard of hearing! Children's Special Health Care Services, (Cripple Children's Fund at the time) purchased my brother's aid but refused to pay for mine. My family had to borrowed money to buy my hearing aid, which was a significant expense.

I used that first hearing aid for 11 years with the last year of it being held together with scotch tape and rubber bands as my parents could not afford new aids. I then moved onto using my deceased great grandmother's older hearing aid for another two years. Really, this can be a significant hardship for families.

Half the other states currently require insurance coverage for hearing aids for children. Research has consistently shown that hearing aids and their auxiliary devices are essential tools for deaf and hard of hearing (d/hh) children, enabling them to learn to speak and use spoken language, which is the preferred communication method for most families when it is feasible for the child.

My family was fortunate to have access or oral education for the d/hh in my county. My mother played a crucial role in helping me catch up with my hearing peer through evening and weekend efforts for nearly five years. But today, another issue is the scarcity of local, oral educational programs for deaf and hard of hearing children in the state. The extensive verbal and spoken language rehabilitation that my brother and I received over 50 years ago is now largely unavailable. The local program we were in, closed over a decade ago, along with scores of others around the state. Additionally, there is no longer any university in the state that educates teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing. Consequently, it is utmost importance that modern d/hh children are provided and fitted with hearing aids and auxiliary devices as soon as their deaf/hard of hearing status is identified, as most of them are integrated into regular education classes.

Please, consider passing these bills. While these are small numbers of children, the impact for each individual one and their families would be considerable. Thank you for considering this important issue!



-Nancy L. Asher

710 Charles St. Ypsilanti, MI 48198-3004