

Dear Joint Ways and Means Committee Members:

RE: HB 2994 – Children’s Hearing Aid Insurance

Today I write you as the proud parent of a deaf adult daughter who is thriving because she was able to receive hearing aids and good educational support as a child because we were able to personally afford it. She went on to be a National Merit Scholar in high school, was the president of her honors class as an undergraduate, and earned a master’s degree in biology. Today she is a data analyst and cartographer working on water resource issues in Hillsboro.

Children deserve the best shot at life and education. For some, this includes the right to hear. Sadly, there are significant holes in Oregon’s law related to insurance coverage for deaf and hard of hearing children. HB 4104 was passed, almost unanimously, in 2018 and attempted to address these issues by requiring the coverage of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and certain assistive listening devices for kids. Unfortunately, during implementation over the last four years, children and families have struggled to get coverage for these critical services and devices. These problems must be remedied, and HB 2994 does exactly that by clarifying the coverage of services and devices, as approved by the legislature in 2018, to ensure all our children have a chance to thrive.

Children not being able to afford hearing aids and related audiology services is tragic for moral and fiscal reasons. We should not be limiting the ability to hear to only those who can personally afford it. Many studies have shown that early identification, amplification, and supportive interventions with deaf and hard of hearing children greatly enhances their cognitive development, academic success, and ultimately their life-time earnings while also reducing the costs to society for special education and subsequent social service costs.

A small investment in hearing aids, particularly early in early life, can mitigate these costs to individuals and society and be very net-revenue beneficial to the state. A [2019 Hearing Review study](#) estimates that untreated hearing loss costs the United States \$133 billion per year.

Related findings were reported in a study which estimated that the annual cost to society for someone with moderate to severe hearing loss will be \$297,000 (in year 2000 dollars) plus an additional \$61,000 for children’s special education costs. For children born with hearing loss, the societal life-time costs for an individual were estimated to be over \$1 million. The authors note that: “The particularly high costs associated with prelingual onset of severe to profound hearing impairment suggest interventions aimed at children, such as early identification and/or aggressive medical intervention, may have a [substantial payback](#).”

HB 2994 clarifies and expands coverage of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive listening devices for children so that the state can capture these net social and economic benefits. More than 25 states have already passed such legislation and illustrated the low costs and very positive impacts that hearing-related insurance coverage has for individuals and our broader society.

Passage of this bill is both morally and economically wise for the state. Let's not be penny wise and pound foolish and do the right thing by enacting this bill.

Sincerely,

Doug Baker, Ph.D.  
PNW AG Bell Legislative Committee Chair