



State Representative Casey Weinstein House Bill 243 – Madeline’s Law

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 243, Madeline’s Law, with my joint sponsor, Representative Russo.

When I was approached by Madeline’s parents with their struggles to afford their young daughter’s hearing aids due to the lack of insurance coverage, I knew this was an issue that had to be confronted head-on. Not long after my office began working on this legislation, we learned that my friend and colleague, Representative Russo, had also been approached by citizens dealing with this issue. While the deaf and hard-of-hearing community may be small in terms of Ohio’s raw population, the effect that the lack of coverage for children’s hearing aids bares on families is extreme and felt throughout the state. That is why Representative Russo and I came together to joint-sponsor legislation that clarifies children’s hearing aids are **not** mere “cosmetic” devices, as they are currently defined.

To the contrary: hearing aids are life-changing devices, especially for children. Personally, I find it insulting that we equate children’s right to hear with an adult’s want for botox when we know hearing is the foundation for not just listening, but for reading, writing, and spoken language. The Ohio General Assembly has long recognized the importance of children’s hearing, having passed legislation requiring universal newborn hearing screening in hospitals

and birthing centers back in 2002.¹ 17-years later, it is only natural that we follow in our predecessor's footsteps in advancing children's right to hear.

It is in recognition of that fact that we have been able to garner **bipartisan** support for Madeline's Law from State Representatives throughout Ohio. Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the House Health Committee our proposal is a modest one with two simple components.

1: For health insurance plans to cover one hearing aid per hearing-impacted ear up to \$2,500 every 4-years for individuals under the age of 21, for no more than \$5,000 total.

2: For health insurance plans to cover the associated costs for screenings, fitting, and repairs required for the proper care and maintenance of hearing aids.

We would be far from the first to do this. Currently, twenty-three of fifty states require some form of insurance coverage for children's hearing aids, from Massachusetts to Texas. The legislation before you today is based partially on what our neighbors were able to accomplish in Kentucky, and partially on what our friends in the South were able to accomplish in Georgia; which has a population total very similar to our own.

As legislators, we have an obligation to ensure the success of future generations, regardless of any pre-existing conditions. We are **failing** to do that for deaf and hard-of-hearing kids here in Ohio. It is time for us to join the growing number of states that have stepped up and recognized what a pervasive problem the lack of coverage is and let the people know that when we fight for families, we fight for all.

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 243, Madeline's Law. I'd now like to introduce my fellow joint sponsor, Representative Russo, for her testimony. Thank you.

¹ House Bill 150, sponsored by then-State Representative, now State Senator Kirk Schuring.
http://archives.legislature.state.oh.us/BillText124/124_HB_150_I_N.html