

Submitter: Amber Hertz-Tang

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2994

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my testimony. I am a physician, wife, and mother living in Portland Oregon. My daughter was born with profound, bilateral sensorineural hearing loss. That means she is very deaf. So deaf, that she would never hear my voice. She would never hear me say "I love you" as I tuck her in at night and she would never hear me yell "STOP" if she were running out into a street as a car was passing by. Learning normal speech would be a nearly impossible task, one that would require me to quit my job and give up seeing patients so that I could take on the task of hours of speech therapy and early education to ensure she has the future she deserves. I know that this is what would have happened, because my husband was also born with profound hearing loss. His mother had to quit her job to make sure he got the services and attention he needed to learn speech and he was hit by a car when he was a child in the exact situation I mentioned, fortunately he had minor injuries. My husband did not have the opportunity to have cochlear implants as a child. He got them as an adult and they were life changing. I know from watching his struggles how much harder he had to work to get to the same place in life as me. He had to use oral interpreters in medical school and with the use of masks during the pandemic it would be nearly impossible for him to communicate if not for his cochlear implants. All that changed after he got his cochlear implants. He can talk on the phone and can communicate without reading lips, something that was not possible before he got his implants. He is successful in his job and is also a physician here in Portland. He no longer needs interpreters, which would have significantly limited his job opportunities, few medical practices can afford to pay a full time interpreter.

On the day of my daughter's birth, when we learned she was deaf, we shook off our grief and fear and immediately made plans to get her cochlear implants. I was astounded at how difficult the process was. It took multiple appeals to get our insurance to approve it and we nearly had to seek out legal advice. Again, my husband and I are both physicians and are familiar with navigating the healthcare system. I can't imagine how difficult it would be for someone with fewer advantages to get their child through this process. She had hearing aids for a time which are completely inadequate for her level of hearing. They would basically allow her to hear if a train was coming but probably not from which direction and certainly not give her access to the sounds of speech she would need to learn to communicate. As it was she was outgrowing her ear molds much faster than we could access new ones, meaning her hearing aids frequently didn't fit properly. We also have a high deductible plan and had to pay out over \$10,000 in the course of one calendar year just on her getting access to audiology, surgeons, speech therapy, in addition to the hearing devices. Fortunately we had the funds to do this but many families would be

unable to pay this. I will mention my daughter is completely healthy and has no other health needs. She is so bright and talented and will be successful in anything she puts her mind to. Securing her access to normal hearing with her cochlear implants is allowing her the same opportunities as normal hearing kids and give her the chance to be a productive asset to this community. It also allows me as her mother and biggest advocate to keep doing what I love--providing medical care to patients in need, rather than sacrificing my career which I absolutely would have done in a heartbeat to ensure my daughter was able to learn speech.

In summary, access to cochlear implants have changed the lives of everyone in my family and have helped our community in multiple ways. These children can be amazingly successful if given the opportunity. Please support this bill and help families like mine to be successful.