

Submitter: Christina Slusarczyk
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

My name is Christina Slusarczyk and I am an ASHA-Certified Speech-Language Pathologist who works exclusively with children who are deaf or hard of hearing who are learning to listen/talk via technology such as hearing aids or cochlear implants. The technology that exists today is truly incredible, and I am lucky that I get to work every day with deaf/hard of hearing children who are thriving communicators and scholars because of it. However, these children are able to flourish because of the ability to attend Tucker Maxon School, where tuition payments grant access to an onsite audiologist who can provide all necessary services without delay. Such is not the case for the majority of deaf/hard of hearing children in the state of Oregon whose basic ability to hear adequately is at mercy of what their insurance plan will pay for.

As professionals, we work hard to educate families that early, optimal, and CONSISTENT access to the full sound spectrum is essential for speech and language development in children who are deaf/hard of hearing. Frequent updates to programming and fitting are absolutely necessary to achieve this. Every week (yes, WEEK) that goes by where a child does not have optimally fitted hearing devices is lost brain potential and reduced quality of life. At these early ages, even a very short period of time without optimally fitted devices can have permanent detrimental effects on the developing child's ability to communicate fluently and achieve their fullest social and academic potential.

Children are not just little adults, they are growing and developing rapidly. Dramatic changes to hearing status, ear size, and even neurology can occur practically overnight. A child whose insurance plan only covers a limited number of audiology visits or one that places constraints on what types of services can be rendered at a given time may have to go for months with technology that is not providing them with what they need to hear and learn. Unfortunately we hearing and speech professionals see this happening frequently, and something needs to be done about it.

As someone who works exclusively with the population affected by this bill, I am frankly appalled that insurance companies are currently allowed to deny our deaf/hard of hearing children the technology and care they need to access the basic human right of communication and connection. I have seen firsthand the difference between children who get what they need and those who don't because their family can't afford it. I am appalled by the inequity that our current law allows and I am voicing my strong support for HB 2994.