

February 21, 2023

Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
House Health & Government Operations Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB1145- Health Insurance - Hearing Aids for Adults - Coverage
Position: **SUPPORT**

Madam Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Ariana Kelly, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Maryland Academy of Audiology (MAA), I am writing to support HB1145, Hearing Aids for Adult Coverage.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) reports that 15% of American adults over the age of 18 years reports some form of difficulties hearing. Additionally, more than 28 million Americans could benefit from the use of hearing aids, yet fewer than 30% of those over the age of 70 years have used them.¹

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) reports that 25 states have health benefit plans that pay for hearing aids for children, four of them also provide coverage for adults. Maryland Code § 15-838 provides \$1,400 per hearing aid every 36 months for minors, when prescribed, fit, and dispensed by a licensed audiologist. Additionally, individuals may choose to upgrade to a more expensive hearing aid and pay the difference.² Unfortunately, adults have been forgotten.

Medicare statutorily excludes coverage of hearing aids for adults. While some third-party payers (e.g., Federal Employee Health Plan (FEHP) BlueCross BlueShield (BCBS) plans cover hearing aids for adults, the majority of plans do not. HB1145 would provide some assistance to adults who seek treatment for their hearing loss.

The MAA represents more than 525 licensed Audiologists who practice in the state of Maryland, and the patients they serve. The MAA's goal is to enhance the ability of members to achieve career and practice objectives by fostering professional autonomy, providing quality continuing education, and increasing public and consumer awareness of hearing and balance disorders and the value of audiologic services. By virtue of

¹ <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-hearing>

² https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/issues/ha_reimbursement/



MARYLAND ACADEMY OF
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education and licensure, Audiologists are the most qualified professionals to manage hearing and balance disorders. An Audiologist is a state-licensed professional who specializes in evaluating, diagnosing, treating, and managing patients with hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance (vestibular) disorders. Audiologists work in a variety of settings: private practice offices, hospitals, medical centers, out-patient clinics, public and private schools, universities (teaching and research), regulatory agencies, large-scale research centers, rehabilitation centers, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, the Veterans Administration, and the U.S. Military. Audiologists work closely with federal, state, and private third-party payers to optimize coverage of services provided for the evaluation and treatment of the patients in their care.

HB1145 provides access and affordability to adults to obtain hearing aid treatment for hearing loss, consistent with the coverage for children in Maryland. Thank you for your time and consideration and to Delegates Reilly, Ghrist, Griffith, Hornberger, Kipke, Schmidt, and Valentine for sponsoring this legislation. I ask for a favorable committee report on HB1145.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leigh McCarthy, AuD".

Leigh McCarthy, Au.D.
Doctor of Audiology
President, MAA

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alicia D.D. Spoor, Au.D.".

Alicia D.D. Spoor, Au.D.
Doctor of Audiology
Legislative Chair, MAA