

February 24, 2025

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members.

The International Hearing Society (IHS) is the professional membership association representing hearing aid specialists in the United States, Canada, and internationally. As such, IHS represents the interests of Maryland hearing aid dispensers (HAD). IHS **strongly supports** SB 641. This bill addresses the exclusion of licensed hearing aid dispensers from the insurance mandate to cover hearing aids. This exclusion creates significant issues in the hearing healthcare community, which this bill resolves.

IHS would like to extend our heartfelt thank you to Senator Gallion and Delegate Reilly for introducing this important bill and continued support for HADs. Your dedication to improving hearing healthcare for Maryland is commendable and greatly appreciated.

Currently, the unintentional exclusion of licensed hearing aid dispensers is problematic for several reasons:

- **Limit access to care:** These changes reduce access to prescription hearing aids from licensed HIDs for the estimated 1.2 million people in MD who may seek hearing healthcare, including those in rural and underserved areas relying on HADs for care.
- **Increase consumer costs:** Requiring patients to schedule additional medical appointments will result in incurring unexpected expenses and adding weeks or months to the process of attaining prescription hearing aids.
- **Patient Choice:** Allowing patients to choose between HADs and audiologists empowers them to make decisions that best suit their individual needs and circumstances. This flexibility is essential for ensuring all Marylanders have access to the care they require and currently, the law does not provide for that choice.

Hearing aid dispensers are licensed by the Department of Health and trained to assess hearing loss and order the use of and fit hearing aids. They have met state-required educational and examination standards for licensure. They are also required to complete continuing education to stay updated with the latest advancements in hearing aid technology and best practices, which

helps maintain high-quality care for patients. They play a crucial role in improving the quality of life for individuals with hearing impairments.

The IHS supports an amendment removing the HAD fitting minors' mandate language. As the national organization representing HADs, we do not normally want to accept any scope of practice restrictions. However, assisting minors is a unique circumstance which is best served with a team approach. Additionally, discussions are ongoing with stakeholders to ensure both HADs and audiologists (AuDs) are eligible to participate in managed care, while maintaining a health plan's discretion to impose heightened prescription requirements for both HADs and AuDs. We look forward to these continued discussions.

IHS strongly encourages you to support SB 641 with amendments, which will help ensure better access to care, lower costs, and provide greater choice for Maryland residents. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and for your continued efforts to improve healthcare access for all Marylanders. I invite any questions or comments via cseitz@ihsinfo.org or 734-522-7200.

Respectfully,



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International Hearing Society