

SB641_SponsorAmendment_973329

Uploaded by: Senator Gallion

Position: FAV



SB0641/973329/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

13 FEB 25
11:18:10

BY: Senator Gallion
(To be offered in the Finance Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 641
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 5, strike “minors and”; in line 6, strike “prescribed” and substitute “ordered”; and in line 11, strike “15–838 and”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On pages 1 and 2, strike in their entirety the lines beginning with line 17 on page 1 through line 17 on page 2, inclusive.

On page 3, in line 1, after “are” insert “:

(1);

in the same line, after “audiologist” insert a semicolon; and in line 2, after “**OR**” insert:

(2) ORDERED, FITTED, AND DISPENSED BY”.

SB641_NFB_FAV

Uploaded by: Sharon Maneki

Position: FAV

Subject: Favorable SB641//HB1355 Health Insurance - Required Coverage - Hearing Aids

Date: February 26, 2025

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002

President@nfbmd.org

To: Senate Finance Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the Senate Finance Committee to vote favorable on SB641//HB1355, a bill that will require insurance companies to cover the cost of hearing aids ordered, fitted, and dispensed by a licensed hearing aid dispenser.

Some people are both blind and suffer hearing loss. For instance, if a person has retinitis pigmentosa, which affects vision, they may also have Usher's disease, which affects hearing. For a blind person, it is very difficult to also have a hearing disability because in addition to having difficulty in communications, they also may have difficulty with orientation and mobility. They can miss some of the auditory and environmental cues that allow them to determine their location, so they have trouble traveling.

This bill will make it easier for those who need hearing aids to get them. Please vote in favor of SB641//HB1355.

MAA FWA Letter SB 641- final.pdf

Uploaded by: Advocacy Maryland Academy of Audiology

Position: FWA

February 26, 2025

Chair Pamela Beidle
Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **SB 641- Health Insurance – Required Coverage – Hearing Aids**

Position: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Madam Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Maryland Academy of Audiology (MAA), I am writing to **support with amendments** SB 641, Hearing Aids for Adult Coverage.

One of the Maryland Academy of Audiology's (MAA) core principles is accessibility to hearing (audiologic) and balance (vestibular) healthcare. Hearing Aid Dispensers (HADs) in Maryland obtain a 2-year education degree and clinical training hours to fit and order suitable hearing instruments, including prescription hearing aids.¹

The amendments offered to SB 641 eliminate the MAA's concerns of HADs working with a population outside their education and training (minors/pediatrics). Additionally, the change in the semantic language from 'prescribe' to 'order' mimics the Health Occupations (H.O.) Statute language and will confirm that HADs can order, fit, sell, and dispense prescription hearing aids without any barriers of a prescription. These amendments grant Marylanders the ability to choose their hearing aid provider (audiologist or hearing aid dispenser), when hearing aid coverage benefits are available from a third party payor.

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 (CE), and increasing public and consumer awareness of hearing and balance disorders and the value of audiologic services.

¹ Maryland Statute H.O. 2-101. Available:

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebwebsite/Laws/StatuteText?article=gho§ion=2-101&enactments=false>



MARYLAND ACADEMY OF
AUDIOLOGY

Maryland Academy of Audiology

P.O. Box 710

Parkville, MD 21234

<https://maaudiology.org/>

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.

SB 641 provides more access and affordability to adults to obtain hearing aid treatment for hearing loss by adding Hearing Aid Dispensers as eligible providers. I ask for a ***favorable with amendments*** committee report on SB 641.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alicia D.D. Spoor, Au.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

SB641_IHS_FWA

Uploaded by: Christine Seitz

Position: FWA

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,



Christine Seitz
Manager of Government Affairs
International Hearing Society

SB 641 - AUDIOLOGY - FIN - LOSWA.pdf

Uploaded by: State of Maryland (MD)

Position: FWA



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing
Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists
& Music Therapists
4201 Patterson Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21215

2025 SESSION POSITION PAPER

BILL NO: SB 641
COMMITTEE: Finance
POSITION: Support with Amendment

TITLE: Health Insurance – Required Coverage – Hearing Aids

BILL ANALYSIS: SB 641 proposes to alter the circumstances under which insurance coverage is provided for adults and minors needing hearing aids.

POSITION AND RATIONALE: The State Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists and Music Therapists, is in support of SB 641, with the following amendments to put the SB in the same posture as HB 1355:

Amendment 1:

Page 2, Line 7, strike “**OR A LICENSED HEARING AID DISPENSER**”

Amendment 2:

Page 3, Lines 1–2, add “: **(1)**” after the word “are”; after “audiologist add “:”; after “**OR**” add “**(2) ORDERED, FITTED, AND DISPENSED BY**”

While the Board appreciates the efforts to obtain coverage for adults and minors for hearing aids that are prescribed, fitted, or dispensed by a licensed Audiologist, the Board does not support the prescribing, fitting, or dispensing of hearing aids to minors by a licensed Hearing Aid Dispenser. The Board has determined that Hearing Aid Dispensers lack the educational and clinical training required to provide the full scale of services to minors. Additionally, the Board supports coverage provisions for **adult** hearing aids that are ordered, fitted, or dispensed by a licensed Hearing Aid Dispenser.

It is for this reason that the Board of Examiners for Audiologists, Hearing Aid Dispensers, Speech-Language Pathologists and Music Therapists, request a favorable report on SB 641 with amendments.

Should you require further information, please contact Keena Stephenson, Executive Director, at keena.stephenson1@maryland.gov, or 443.832.0597, or Lillian Reese, Legislative Liaison, at Lillian.reese@maryland.gov, or 443-794-4757.

The opinion of the Board expressed in this document does not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or the Administration.

SB0641_UNF_MedChi_HI - Req. Coverage - Hearing Aid

Uploaded by: Danna Kauffman

Position: UNF



The Maryland State Medical Society
1211 Cathedral Street
Baltimore, MD 21201-5516
410.539.0872
Fax: 410.547.0915
1.800.492.1056
www.medchi.org

Senate Finance Committee
February 26, 2025
Senate Bill 641 – *Health Insurance – Required Coverage – Hearing Aids*
POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, opposes Senate Bill 641, which mandates health insurers cover hearing aids for children and adults if they are prescribed, fitted, and dispensed by a licensed hearing aid dispenser. Maryland law only requires coverage if the hearing aids are prescribed, fitted, and dispensed by a licensed audiologist.

MedChi opposes this for three reasons. First, it is unclear what problem this bill is trying to solve, given that we are unaware of an issue with patients obtaining hearing aids. Second, the Maryland Health Care Commission has not yet evaluated this mandated benefit for the societal, medical, and fiscal costs. Without a clear need for this expansion, then this legislation should first be assessed by the Commission. Third, while this bill is a coverage bill, it is also expanding the scope of licensed hearing aid dispensers since they cannot prescribe. MedChi is against licensed hearing aid dispensers from prescribing.

For these reasons, we urge an unfavorable vote.

For more information call:

Danna L. Kauffman
J. Steven Wise
Andrew G. Vetter
Christine K. Krone
410-244-7000