



February 6, 2023

The Honorable Della Au Belatti
Chair, House Committee on Health and Homelessness
415 South Beretania Street Room 420
Honolulu, HI 96813-2425

RE: Hearing Aid Coverage; HB 818

Dear Representative Belatti:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express support for HB 818, which requires each individual and group accident and health or sickness policy, contract, plan, or agreement issued or renewed in Hawaii on or after January 1, 2024, to provide coverage for the cost of hearing aids for the policyholder and individuals covered under the policy, contract, plan, or agreement. We also support the bill's provisions requiring each individual and group hospital or medical service plan contract issued or renewed in Hawaii on or after January 1, 2024, to provide coverage for the cost of hearing aids for members and individuals covered under the individual and group hospital or medical service plan contract.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Over 590 ASHA members reside in Hawaii.¹

ASHA supports HB 818, which also requires a minimum coverage benefit of \$1,500 per hearing aid for each hearing-impaired ear every 36 months, and includes both conventional and bone conduction hearing aids.

House Bill 818 provides critical support for reducing instances of untreated hearing loss. Studies have linked untreated hearing loss to many social and economic factors, including depression, withdrawal from social situations, reduced alertness and increased risk to personal safety, impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks, reduced job performance and earning potential, and diminished psychological and overall health.² Approximately 15% of school-age children have some degree of hearing loss in one or both ears, with 5.4% (or about 1 in 20) having less severe or unilateral hearing loss.³ Academic achievement and social functioning are significantly impacted by even a mild to moderate hearing loss, which may bring about difficulty in learning and building important interpersonal skills necessary to healthy self-esteem. In fact, over one-third of children with less severe or unilateral hearing loss are projected to fail at least one grade or will require additional educational support, which is estimated to cost the educational system over \$5.5 billion.⁴

Thank you for helping to ensure that the citizens of Hawaii have access to hearing aids, which will help them participate in daily living activities and improve their ability to engage in

social interaction. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Eileen Crowe, ASHA's director, state association relations, at ecrowe@asha.org.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Augustine, PhD, CCC-SLP
2023 ASHA President

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *Hawaii* [Quick Facts]. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/advocacy/state-fliers/hawaii-state-flyer.pdf>

² Emmett, S. D., & Francis, H. W. (2015). The socioeconomic impact of hearing loss in U.S. adults. *Otology & neurotology: official publication of the American Otological Society, American Neurotology Society [and] European Academy of Otology and Neurotology*, 36(3), 545–550. doi: [10.1097/MAO.0000000000000562](https://doi.org/10.1097/MAO.0000000000000562).

³ Niskar, A.S., Kieszak, S.M., Holmes, A., Esteban, E, Rubin, C., & Brody, D.J. (1998). *Prevalence of Hearing Loss Among Children 6 to 19 Years of Age: The Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey*. *JAMA*, 279(14), 1071–1075. doi:10.1001/jama.279.14.1071.

⁴ Tharpe, A. M. (2008). *Unilateral and mild bilateral hearing loss in children: past and current perspectives*. *Trends in Amplification*, 12(1), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1084713807304668>.