



**ASHA**  
American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

January 27, 2023

The Honorable Tina Orwall  
416 Sid Snyder Ave SW  
John L. O'Brien Building, Room 326  
Olympia, WA 98501-1347

RE: Hearing Instrument Coverage; HB 1222

Dear Representative Orwall:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express support for HB 1222, which requires hearing instrument coverage, including bone conduction hearing devices, and provides Washingtonians with access to much needed hearing related health care coverage.

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 3,900 ASHA members reside in Washington.<sup>1</sup>

ASHA supports HB 1222, which also specifies that hearing instruments are covered in the amount of \$2,500 per ear every 36 months.

House Bill 1222 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 for 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.<sup>4</sup>

Thank you for helping to ensure that the citizens of Washington 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](mailto:ecrowe@asha.org).

Sincerely,

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

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<sup>1</sup> American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022). *Washington* [Quick Facts].

<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedfiles/advocacy/state-fliers/washington-state-flyer.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> 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. <https://doi.org/10.1097/MAO>.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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>.