



## Let Washington Kids Hear

Representative Emily Wicks is sponsoring the Children's Hearing Aid Bill, which needs to be a priority this legislative session, as more children are falling behind and this inequitable situation worsens for deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

Jill Bujnevicie, PA-C has a 5 year old son named Hugo, who was diagnosed with moderate hearing loss two years ago. Before external hearing aids, he was falling behind his peers. But his hearing aids have enabled him to thrive.

As healthcare providers, she and her husband were astounded to learn that private insurance has a massive gap in coverage. Hearing aids, which can cost more than \$4k, are not covered. This money doesn't even count toward one's deductible.

Medicaid and some self-funded plans cover hearing aids, but the vast majority of families have to spend thousands of dollars a year so that our children can hear. This issue is also widespread:

- Hearing loss is one of the most common birth defects in America, with about 3 in 1,000 babies born with permanent hearing loss.
- For children, hearing is key to learning spoken language, engaging socially and performing academically.
- 1 out of 5 parents cannot afford the cost of hearing aids for their children, according to the Better Hearing Institute.

A national organization called "Let America Hear" has formed, and with families like Jill's, there is now legislation in 26 states to cover children's hearing aids, including Oregon and Idaho.

Representative Wicks will be the prime sponsor of the Children's Hearing Aid Bill this year, and she knows firsthand what it's like to go without hearing aids as a child. This initiative started two years ago with Representative Kilduff, who re-introduced HB 2410 last year along with Senator Van DeWege's companion bill, SB 6291.

### Make Sure All Kids Can Hear!

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