

SCR 34

Measure Title: REQUESTING THE AUDITOR TO ASSESS THE SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF REQUIRING HEALTH INSURERS TO OFFER COVERAGE FOR HEARING AIDS.

Report Title: Health Insurance; Mandated Coverage; Hearing Aids; Impact Assessment Report

Description:

Companion:

Package: None

Current Referral: CPN, WAM

Introducer(s): CHUN OAKLAND, GREEN, Baker, Ihara, Taniguchi



NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR

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TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE
Regular Session of 2014

Friday, March 21, 2014
9:30 a.m.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

TESTIMONY ON SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 34 – REQUESTING THE AUDITOR TO ASSESS THE SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF REQUIRING HEALTH INSURERS TO OFFER COVERAGE FOR HEARING AIDS.

TO THE HONORABLE ROSALYN H. BAKER, CHAIR, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

My name is Gordon Ito, State Insurance Commissioner, testifying on behalf of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs ("Department"). The Department supports this resolution, and submits the following comments.

The purpose of Senate Bill No. 309 is to add a new mandated health insurance benefit requiring health insurers, hospital and medical services plan, and health maintenance organizations to provide coverage for hearing aids.

Any proposed mandated health insurance coverage requires the passage of a concurrent resolution requesting the State Auditor to prepare and submit a report assessing the social and financial impacts of the proposed mandate, pursuant to Hawaii Revised Statutes § 23-51. Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 34 fulfills this requirement.

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Additionally, the addition of a new mandated coverage may trigger section 1311(d)(3) of federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which requires states to defray the additional cost of any benefits in excess of the essential health benefits of the state's qualified health plan.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to present testimony on this matter.



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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March 21, 2014

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Senate Concurrent Resolution 34 – Requesting the Auditor to Assess the Social and Financial Impacts of Requiring Health Insurers to Offer Coverage for Hearing Aids

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 34 - Requesting the Auditor to Assess the Social and Financial Impacts of Requiring Health Insurers to Offer Coverage for Hearing Aids. We are aware that it is a requirement for a study to be conducted related to the social and financial effects of requiring health insurers to offer coverage for hearing aids per sections 21-51 and 23-52, Hawaii Revised Statutes. DCAB supports this study in order to obtain necessary information to amend the statute in an informed and appropriate manner to mandate increased coverage for hearing aids.

Hearing is essential to most individuals in their daily lives (waking up to an alarm clock, listening for our family members, watching television, or talking on the phone). It allows us to be connected to others in our environment. A hearing aid enhances the person's ability to interact independently in the community, but the cost is prohibitive to the average adult and it may be multiplied when several members in one family need hearing aids. Being able to have more of the cost covered by a health plan would enable some individuals to be able to obtain a hearing aid without feeling guilty that the money is better spent on some other necessity. An individual should not have to choose between hearing or not hearing when a hearing aid is available as a viable option.

DCAB also acknowledges and appreciates the Senate's use of "people-first language" in the "Whereas" clause on page 2, line 35 in this concurrent resolution.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

BARBARA FISCHLOWITZ-LEONG
Chairperson

FRANCINE WAI
Executive Director

Dear Committee,

This subject is near and dear to my heart. I have a daughter that is hard of hearing (severe hearing loss). She loves music and language and has greatly benefited from hearing aids.

It is truly unacceptable and unfair that hearing aids are almost completely excluded from Hawaii health plans. Parents and caretakers can become overwhelmed with the cost of hearing aids rising up to \$5000. Some hard of hearing children have never worn a hearing aid, which can permanently delay language development.

Many other states require pediatric hearing aid services benefits and others require pediatric and adult hearing aid services to be covered.

Hawaii should require their insurance companies to do the "right thing" and pay for this basic human need and right to hear.

What confuses me is when a child is born with spina bifida or a debilitating disability, the insurance company will pay for many services including wheelchairs. (*considered durable medical equipment) A child that is born with a hearing loss, is NOT afforded the same right for their disability. (*durable medical equipment i.e. hearing aids)

If we don't provide our hard of hearing children with hearing aids, we are only partially educating them. Spoken language is very important in society. If someone has the ability to hear with the help of durable medical equipment, and become a productive person (with proper training) why are we not requiring insurance companies to do their duties?

My daughter is 19 years old (she is here with me today) she has benefited from hearing aids since she was 2 years old. My husband was in the military prior to 2007. In the military, hearing aids are covered 100%. My daughter has been unable to get new hearing aids since then. My insurance company (HMSA) told me they will cover a set of digital hearing aids with a allowance of \$550 max. Her hearing aids run around \$4500 for both ears. My out of pocket cost would be the remaining \$3950.

My daughter also has epilepsy, she was hospitalized 2 years ago for 3 days, due to a bad seizure that required monitoring, MRI scan, CT scan, and numerous blood tests.

The total cost ran into the \$10,000s. My insurance covered almost everything. Why will they not cover a basic necessity, hearing?

I am begging you to please, if not for my child, for other young children that deserve to hear the world and learn language to become productive members of society, make it mandatory for insurance companies to provide this durable medical equipment. We CAN make a difference in the hard of hearing society, but it starts with the insurance companies.

Thank you for this consideration!

Jennifer Carruthers

Parent of a Hard of hearing high schooler

Hello All,

I am a 19 Year old hard of hearing (hoh) high school senior. I don't understand why insurance companies are not required to cover hearing aids. I was born with a hearing loss. It is not anything I did to become hoh. I know that my parents have struggled to get me hearing aids. We went to an audiologist and because my insurance only covered a small amount and I was young, they were not very interested in helping me get my current aids fixed. In fact they did not even call my mom back after she called many times to speak with them. They knew that they weren't going to get paid a lot of money like if I were to get a NEW pair of hearing aids.

Please make it a requirement for insurance companies to cover more of the cost of hearing aids. We should make it affordable so every kid and adult can share the same joy of hearing. It is a basic need.

Thank you for listening
Sydney

SCR34

Submitted on: 3/19/2014

Testimony for CPN on Mar 21, 2014 09:30AM in Conference Room 229

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Renante Natividad	Individual	Comments Only	No

Comments: I support SCR 34 to have health insurance to help finance our hearing aid. I'm hearing aid user since I lost my hearing at the age of 5. Hearing aid is very expensive. Hearing aid is like a car. You need to keep it clean and avoid moisture. Moisture damage our hearing aid. Hawaii is very humid and we surrounded by ocean. Hearing aid get easily damage and it cost us money to get it clean, fix or replace. Not only that, hearing aid battery cost me about \$40 dollar every month. My hearing aid battery drain out every week since I use it everyday for work and to listen everyone around me 24/7. I hope to hear that SCR 34 will pass. Thank you.

Please note that testimony submitted less than 24 hours prior to the hearing, improperly identified, or directed to the incorrect office, may not be posted online or distributed to the committee prior to the convening of the public hearing.

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SCR34

Submitted on: 3/20/2014

Testimony for CPN on Mar 21, 2014 09:30AM in Conference Room 229

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Ed Chevy	Individual	Support	Yes

Comments: RE: SCR34 DEAR COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION, MY NAME IS ED CHEVY AND I AM DEAF. I DEPEND ON HEARING AID TO HELP ME COPE WITH POWER OF COMMUNICATION AND SOUNDS. MY SON, CLYDE DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON HEARING AIDS TO HELP HIM WITH SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL LIFE. ACTUALLY, MY WHOLE FAMILY RELIES ON HEARING AIDS TO COPE WITH THE WORLD. I SUPPORT SCR34 BECAUSE INSURANCE IS NOT FLEXIBLE IN COVERING THE COSTS OF HEARING AIDS. IDEALLY, WE PAY 20% AND THE INSURANCE COVERS 80%. IT'S NOT HAPPENING WITH HEARING AIDS. DUE TO PROGRESSIVE LOSS, WE NEED NEW HEARING AIDS EVERY FIVE YEARS TO KEEP UP WITH TECHNOLOGY. PLEASE PASS SCR34 SO THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY ASD A WHOLE WILL HAVE BETTER REALTIONSHIP WITH THE HEARINGS. THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO TESTIFY SINCERELY, ED CHEVY

Please note that testimony submitted less than 24 hours prior to the hearing, improperly identified, or directed to the incorrect office, may not be posted online or distributed to the committee prior to the convening of the public hearing.

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