

March 8, 2022

Dear House Committee on Health Care,

In testimony two weeks ago the committee enquired about the personal experiences of Vermonters with hearing loss. Vermonters from all over the state have reached out to our coalition to share their stories and thoughts in hopes that it may help advance this important legislation. Of the thousands of people who signed our petition in support of H.266, we have selected a few quotes from individuals in every corner of the state. We hope this will help illuminate the broad support this bill has from your constituents and neighbors.

Sincerely,



“Hearing loss runs in my family. My parents suffered with low-quality hearing aids for decades because that was what they could afford. My siblings and my husband all delayed getting hearing aids because of the cost, and two of my siblings still haven't purchased them.”

Barbara Richardson, Brandon

“I’ve worn hearing aids for over 50 years. They are expensive, a total necessity for me since I am profoundly deaf. Hearing aids also need to be replaced every 5-10 years. I’ve been able to pay for them over time but it is a large expense and assistance with paying for aids would make life less stressful.”

S. Mackenzie, Burlington

“I am 61. I was diagnosed with a hearing loss several years ago but there was no way I could afford over \$4000 for hearing aids. Now the hearing loss is getting worse and is interfering substantially with my work as a marriage therapist. I would like to work for several more years but may not be able to without hearing aids.”

Stephanie Churchill, Caledonia County

“Having taught students, as well as having had family members with significant hearing loss, I know the cost of hearing aids is substantial, and the impact of having them tremendous. Imagine living in a silent world...severely limited communication with others, and missing out on the sounds of the world around you...it is a travesty to withhold this sensory information from anyone who experiences hearing loss. A set of ordinary hearing aids cost my parents around \$4000 to \$6000, which would be prohibitive if not impossible for many senior adults with fixed incomes, and for families struggling to pay their monthly bills. Hearing is not optional, it is essential. Please make it an accessible right for all.”

Donna Fraser-Leary, Charlotte

“I have had my current hearing aids for over 10 years and I suspect they are now outdated. I've thought about trying new ones, but they are very expensive and I have been holding off for that reason. Passing this bill would allow me to upgrade my hearing aids without it being such a financial burden.”

Robert Somers, Dorset

“I'm lucky to have hearing aids. When I don't wear them, I cannot hear any conversations and I feel left out of family and social gatherings. I cannot wear them every day because I have severe pain in my inner ears due to nerve involvement. I think often about all the people that cannot afford hearing aids. My day to day life difficult when I can't hear. Hearing aids are not a luxury they are a NECESSITY.”

Katherine White, Essex

“I wear hearing aids. However, I have needed them for years but could not afford them. I was so surprised when I found out that my insurance company did not cover hearing aids. I was only able to get hearing aids when the pandemic struck. I was able to use stimulus money to buy my hearing aids from Costco.”

J. Gibson, Franklin County

“Hearing is not a luxury, it's a necessity. How could ANYONE be against this bill. Vermont is the most liberal state in the nation and legislators won't pass this bill? I currently don't need hearing aids but I know plenty of people that do. I ask legislators to pass this bill. Don't give in to the insurance company lobby.”

Dave Bellini, Montpelier

“When I was 50 (I am now 67) I woke up one morning with almost total hearing loss in my right ear. I went to the doctors and they tried to discover the reason why. I had an MRI but nothing unusual showed up. I learned to live with diminished hearing because I still had hearing in my left ear. About 3 years ago, I started having fluctuations of loss of hearing in my left ear in unusual ways - sometimes it lasted a week, sometimes it could come back the next day. Many times, I've been put on prednisone for 10 days

each time it would occur. I've been to the doctors, had tests, tried different things and they can't say why it is happening. I've been on a low salt diet, tried taking diuretics, and finally about 1 1/2 years ago, my audiologist suggested hearing aids to help. I wasn't able to afford the cost of them and the only reason I have them now is because a family member paid for them for me. Not everybody is as lucky as that. Even with the hearing aids, when my hearing fluctuates, it's hard because they don't help much with only one good ear. You need to hear to work, at least in my job, to relate to other people and for your health. It can be very isolating and also scary because you can't hear sounds around you. There have been times when I can't talk on the phone, and twice I've had to text for someone to help me or ask people to write down their questions, so I could answer. Not having these hearing aids to help, life would be so much harder and smaller. I don't understand how someone could think that hearing is not important to one's health. Please help support coverage for hearing aids - the cost is prohibitive for so many people."

Kathleen, Montpelier

"My husband wears hearing aids due to severe congenital hearing loss. The cost of these are a huge financial impact on us as we raise our 3 children. Cost of medical insurance is already outrageous so would think that hearing aids would be a covered medical necessity. I know without my husband's hearing aids, there would be many disadvantages for him."

K. White, Orange

"My spouse has a profound binaural hearing loss and wears hearing aids, which are expensive; without them, he and other people with hearing aids are not able to live full and successful lives. Hearing loss is also an "invisible" handicap; despite the visibility of hearing aids, many people just don't notice them. They don't consider that the person simply cannot hear, or cannot make out speech clearly, and they simply assume that those with hearing impairments are not paying attention, are rude, and/or are intellectually disabled. In addition, hearing loss is damaging to a person's self-esteem and to their ability to engage fully with their communities."

Regina Logan, Orange County

"I know what it like to have hearing loss. I have several friends that need hearing aids but cannot afford them. I myself cannot afford to purchase the type and quality of the hearing aids that I need. I work with many ages and cultures and have a very difficult time hearing them clearly, Background noise is a great hazard when trying to hear or have my own conversation."

Carolyn Cruikshank, Rochester

"Both of my parents have hearing aids and everyone who needs them should have them, regardless of wealth or income, if that is possible."

Sara, Rutland Town

“Hearing well is a necessity for a positive quality of life. It is a medical issue and should be included in all medical insurance programs...including in Vermont!”

Anne Powell, Shelburne

“Cost of prescription drugs is overwhelming, cost of a doctor office visit keeps going up, insurance costs keep going up, and day-to-day living costs are way up. Hearing aids are at an insurmountable cost that the average person cannot afford. How can any person who requires a hearing aid able to afford to get them when other costs are taking all of a person's income? Hearing aids give back a person's dignity and self-worth.”

Homer Wetherby, Sheldon

“I have interacted with many people that would greatly benefit from using hearing aids but do not use them because of the very high cost on the devices. Having health plans in Vermont not cover some of the costs of hearing aids is unconscionable! Hearing loss negatively impact employment for retirees and a good number of people younger than 65 too.”

Leonard Bostwick, S. Burlington

“If you have a hearing disability you know how crucial hearing devices are for everyday quality of life. Hearing loss leads to withdrawal from social activities and interaction which ultimately will hasten the onset of dementia. Please, I beg of you, help you fellow Vermonters who are in need of hearing support.”

Thomas Breiner, Swanton

“I'm in my 30s and had a cyst growing in my middle ear. I have had six surgeries and lost all of the hearing bones in my middle ear. I was left with conductive hearing loss. I have had surgery to try and correct my hearing, but it didn't work. I was left needed a hearing aid. The hearing aid was incredibly necessary, but expensive. The purchase of a hearing aid was a burden on our family, and we had to make sacrifices in order to afford it. Not only older people suffer from hearing loss. I hope I don't have to spend the rest of my life spending thousands of dollars on hearing aids every few years. This hearing aid has changed my quality of life considerably. I hope hearing aids will be covered by medical insurance in the future to protect my hearing and quality of life.”

E. King, Washington County