



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

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Jason Gallion  
Maryland General Assembly  
420 James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Hearing Aid Coverage; SB 397

Dear Senator Gallion:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to express support for SB 397, which requires insurers to provide coverage for hearing aids for adults.

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 4,100 ASHA members reside in Maryland.<sup>1</sup>

ASHA supports SB 397, which also specifies that hearing aid purchases are subject to a minimum benefit of \$1,400 per hearing-impaired ear every 36 months.

SB 397 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 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.<sup>4</sup>

Thank you for helping to ensure that the citizens of Maryland 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 Susan Adams, ASHA's director, state legislative and regulatory affairs, at [sadams@asha.org](mailto:sadams@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). *Maryland* [Quick Facts].

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

<sup>2</sup> Emmett, S. D., & Francis, H. W. (2015). The Socioeconomic Impact of Hearing Loss in U.S. Adults. *36*(3), 545–550. doi: [10.1097/MAO.0000000000000562](https://doi.org/10.1097/MAO.0000000000000562).

<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>.