

House 7488 & Senate 2279
The Health and Human Services Committee
State House
June 8, 2004

My name is Steven A. Florio and I am the Executive Director of Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This commission is known as an one-stop center on all Deaf and Hard of Hearing matters. We deal with all deaf and hard of hearing individuals' needs every day whether they need resources, referrals, and training.

As you know, a single hearing aid is quite very expensive and I understand the insurance company's concern from their economic standpoints. The prices per hearing aid are between \$1,000 and \$3,500 depending on the level of hearing loss individual has and the type of hearing aids (conventional, programmable, and digital). Many hearing aid dealers offer many different brands and sizes of hearing aids and features on hearing aids such as 2 channels of sounds, 5 channels of sounds, noise reduction, etc. It is best to have professional audiologists conduct the hearing tests and identify which type of hearing aid that would work best for the individual. This shall be covered by all insurers just like any regular doctor visit for any reason.

Like I said earlier, the prices are between \$1,000 and \$3,500 for a single hearing aid. It is already financially problematic for anyone who really needs one or two hearing aids. In this bill, S 2279, "20% of the cost of or \$400 whichever is smaller" is inserted. The RI CDHH supports this because it would become mandatory to be part of any plans. It is not fair for anyone who has the hearing challenge has to pay most of the costs while others don't have to. In addition, the insurer shall also offer additional insurance annually for those who want to buy for any loss or damage of hearing aid within the 36-month period. It is very important for the individual to find the right type of hearing aid for their hearing loss regardless the cost of hearing aid. Some individuals have very profound hearing loss that would need very powerful kind of hearing aids. Someone who has some residual hearing loss would need good hearing aid to pick up the right level of sounds for better hearing. Also, all hearing aids shall be prescribed by certified audiologists or qualified ear care providers so this way, the insurance companies can trust their quality of services. The similar principle for getting glasses that must be prescribed by the eye care providers such as optometrists or opticians.

At the previous Senate hearing on S2279 on April 28, 2004, Senator Stephen Alves had received a call from someone who was concerned about losing the hearing aid benefit from the Shriners if this bill is passed. After I researched this program not a long ago, I

learned that the Shriners continue to provide the hearing tests, hearing aids, and ear molds at no cost to children who are under 18 years old. Sue Bowering who is working with Shriners's office, (401) 444-5485, at Rhode Island Hospital has informed me that the Shriners would still pay the difference of the hearing aid costs after the insurance coverage plan paid. However, they must take the hearing test at RI Hospital Hearing & Speech Center to qualify for the Shriner program.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, we support this bill.

Once again, I want to thank you for giving me an opportunity to share our concerns with you and I strongly encourage you to take serious consideration. For some reason, if more research is needed on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me for more resources that would help you to make a better decision. I can be reached by e-mail, SFLORIO@CDHH.RI.GOV.

Honorably Submitted by:

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