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January 20, 2020

Honorable Richard Saslaw  
Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce and Labor  
Senate Room A, Pocahontas Building  
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Amend SB 423, Coverage for Hearing Aids for Minors

Dear Chairman Saslaw and Members of the Committee on Commerce and Labor:

On behalf of the and the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), the Virginia Society of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (VSO-HNS), and the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (VA-AAP), we are writing to request amendment of SB 423. Section D. makes coverage available exclusively for services provided by an audiologist and does not require medical clearance to be obtained before a child is recommended for a hearing aid. We urge the Committee to amend this section to state: **D. Coverage shall be available under this section for services and equipment with medical clearance from an otolaryngologist. Hearing aid services and equipment may be dispensed by a licensed audiologist, otolaryngologist or hearing aid specialist.**

As background, the AAO-HNS and VSO-HNS represent physicians dedicated to the care of patients with disorders of the ears, nose, throat and related structures of the head and neck. Commonly referred to as ENT physicians, we provide hearing impaired patients of all ages with a full medical evaluation, diagnosis and treatment plan for hearing disorders and diseases.

As you may know, hearing loss is the number one birth defect in the United States. In addition, hearing loss in children can indicate other serious health conditions, including potentially life-threatening renal or cardiac conditions. Therefore, early diagnosis and treatment of hearing loss by a physician, preferably an otolaryngologist, is critical to the overall health of the child, as well as the development of speech, language, cognitive, and psycho-social abilities. Treatable causes of hearing loss are more common in children than adults and the long-term consequences greater and more costly. These differences are recognized by the FDA and Congress as evidenced by the fact that OTC hearing aids will not be available for children and the medical waiver not eliminated for the purchase of hearing aids in children.

While audiologists are important members of the hearing healthcare team, they do not have the education and training to make a medical diagnosis or perform a complete evaluation which is necessary to implement the

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appropriate intervention for children. It is essential that all medical conditions be identified and treated **before** a hearing aid is purchased.

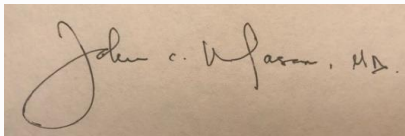
Failure to include the most knowledgeable and well-trained experts in this field does a disservice to patients throughout Virginia. Including otolaryngologists in SB 423's coverage will enable families to obtain a medical diagnosis of their child's hearing loss, and, if appropriate, have their hearing aids prescribed, fitted, and dispensed by a physician who specializes in the medical management of pediatric hearing problems. A broader choice of providers would ensure appropriate access to care and potentially lower costs for these families.

Thank you, in advance, for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact Janice Brannon, Senior Manager of AAO-HNS State Advocacy at [legstate@entnet.org](mailto:legstate@entnet.org) or Dr. John Mason, President of VSO-HNS at [johnmason@virginia.edu](mailto:johnmason@virginia.edu) or Dr. Chung at [sandyleechung1@gmail.com](mailto:sandyleechung1@gmail.com).

Sincerely,



James C. Denny III, MD, FACS  
AAO-HNS EVP/CEO



John Mason, MD  
President, VSO-HNS



Sandy L. Chung, MD, FAAP  
President, American Academy of Pediatrics Virginia Chapter