

I'm 26 years old, and I have worn hearing aids since I was 19. There are a number of reasons why I support HB 2021, but the most important thing I want to get across to you is that hearing aids are NOT elective.

At age 14 I was diagnosed with otosclerosis, which is a hereditary disease that results in conductive hearing loss. My hearing loss is significant so at age 19 I was fitted for my first hearing aid. My family paid over \$3,000 for one hearing aid. Six years later I needed a new hearing aid, plus a second one because my I was losing the hearing in my other ear. At age 24, I paid \$6,000 for new hearing aids.

At that time, I was not far out of college, had student loans, was trying to start a career and a life for myself, and I had no choice but to go further into debt to buy hearing aids. It wasn't an option. It was not elective. I need hearing aids to do my job and function in every day life. My hearing loss is more than just needing to turn the TV up a little bit louder. It is significant, and hearing is a fundamental necessity. I made sacrifices to purchase hearing aids because they have changed my life.

Not only are hearing aids necessary to have a normal quality of life, but they are imperative for safety. I enjoy cycling, and without hearing aids I cannot hear cars, other cyclists, or joggers around me. I would not be able to hear a tornado siren, an alarm clock, a smoke detector, or a baby crying, among so many other things.

I'm having a daughter in May, and it is possible that she will have otosclerosis as well, which would result in my family having to buy two pairs of hearing aids regularly for the rest of our lives. I am fortunate enough that I can make sacrifices, live frugally, and adjust my finances for a few years to pay off hearing aids, but there are many Kansans that are not in a position to do that. Those people, your constituents, should not have to choose between putting food on the table and hearing. Their children should not be deprived of a basic sense that was designed to help humans survive just because their parents cannot afford it.

Hearing is such a simple thing that we often take for granted, but when faced with difficult choices like paying off your student loans, putting food on the table, and paying the rent versus being able to hear, it's plain to see that hearing needs to come first because it is essential for quality of life, safety, and prosperity. It is not elective. Every one of you can make sure that hearing comes first for your constituents.