

Diane Wonchoba

Parent journey to pass hearing aid legislation

Hello



Diane Wonchoba
Minneapolis, MN
Mother of adults

Timeline



1998
Born

2000
Hearing loss
identified

2003
Hearing Aid
Legislation

2008
Hearing Aid
Legislation
expanded

2016
Graduated
from High
School

2019
Diagnosed
with Ushers
2A

Hearing Aid Legislation

- Process to get the legislation passed
- Lessons learned

Tale of three moms

- Stacie Leeper, Bemidji, MN
- Patti Teachout, St. Paul, MN
- Diane Wonchoba, Blaine, MN

Stacie Leeper

- 2 year old son with a hearing loss
- Denied hearing aid coverage
- Challenged the denial with the state Attorney General

State Law (since 1973) 62A.042 FAMILY COVERAGE; COVERAGE OF NEWBORN INFANTS

.....includes as insured or covered members of the family any newborn infants immediately from the moment of birth and thereafter which insurance or contract shall provide coverage for

- illness,
- injury,
- congenital malformation, or
- premature birth.

Attorney General

- Attorney General brought the 1973 state law to Stacie's health care provider and told them the state of Minnesota believes the hearing aids should be covered.
- Stacie's insurance covered her son's hearing aids, but no one else.....

Patti Teachout

- 4 year old son with congenital hearing loss
- Hearing aids were not covered
- Challenged her insurance company, and was denied.
- Was told by insurance company that if you want hearing aid coverage, you would have to change the law.....
- Election season 2002, her state senator was door knocking. She pulled him into her house and discussed with him her issue.

Chuck Wiger, Minnesota State Senator

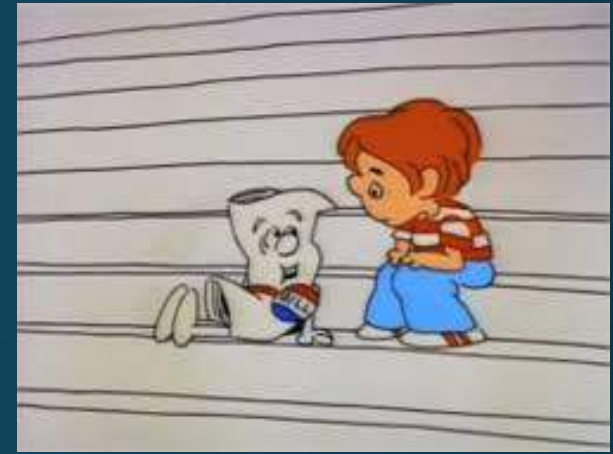
- Patti's senator won his election
- In January 2003, introduced a bill as an amendment to the 1973 law that specified that hearing aids are a treatment option for children born with a hearing loss.

Diane Wonchoba

- Twin 4 year old boys with sensorineural hearing loss
- Hearing loss identified at age 2, but all four ears have an identical audiogram. Therefore, it is suspected that the loss was present at birth.
- First pair of hearing aids, at age 2, were covered. Subsequent hearing aids were not.
- Was told by insurance company, if you want hearing aid coverage, you would need to change the law.

Research

- Public librarian
 - Book for 4th graders
 - Told me about the Governor's commission for deaf and hard of hearing
- Alexander Graham Bell Association
 - Stories about other families passing legislation in their states
 - Called them



Commission for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf Blind

The governor has commissions to oversee areas of interest, develop strategy, and advise.

For Example:

- Food and Safety
 - Special Education
 - Health Care
 - Sports
 - Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf Blind Commission
-
- Mary Hartnett was the director of the commission in 2003

Lunch with Mary



Patti



Diane



Mary

Meetings with Senators and Representatives

- Bring your pictures, tell your story
- Start with the senators and representatives that serve the committees
- Eventually met with every senator and representative

Testimony

- Well prepared, edited, and concise
- Tell your story
- Bring your story to life, in our case we brought our kids
- Address the pros and cons

Hoops to jump

- Senate Health and Human Services committee
- Senate Commerce committee
- Senate floor, passed 60 to 3

- House Health and Human Services committee
- House Commerce committee.....

Commerce Committee Hearing



- Greg Davids (R) chair of the Commerce committee
- Mary asked if we could have a hearing in the commerce committee.
- Rep. Davids asked, “do you want a hearing, or do you want the bill to pass?”
- Rep. Davids knew our bill would not pass his committee, so he offered to include our bill the House Omnibus bill. We took it.

The Bill Passed

- 2003 – all children born in Minnesota would get their hearing aids covered every three years at the same rate as all the other parts of insurance policy until person is 18
- 2007 – Universal Newborn Hearing Screening passed
- 2008 – all children (regardless of when hearing loss acquired) would get their hearing aids covered.
- 2021 – still working on expanding to get adults hearing aids covered

Insurance Mandates

Fully Insured Policies

- Must follow insurance mandates
- Usually smaller companies
- Always government entities

Self Insured Policies

- Does not have to follow insurance mandates
- Usually larger companies

Lessons Learned

- Pay attention to local elections
- Your government is there to work for you...attorney general, senators, representatives
- You can talk to all the legislators, not just the one that represents your district
- Write letters, they matter
- There is a commission that represents people who are deaf and hard of hearing

Most important lessons

- Character of the legislator is far more important than party affiliation.
- Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.
- If not you, then who?

Update

- Boys just graduated from college May 2020
- Eric, Civil Engineering from North Dakota State University
- Cameron, Computer Science from the University of Minnesota

