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Testimony of Rep. Cheryl Golek supporting
**LD 167, An Act to Provide 2 Hearing Aides to MaineCare Members with
Diagnosed Hearing Loss**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Cheryl Golek and I represent District 99, which includes Harpswell and part of Brunswick. I am proud to be standing in support of **LD 167, An Act to Provide 2 Hearing Aides to MaineCare Members with Diagnosed Hearing Loss.**

First, I want to thank Rep. Graham for introducing this bill, which aims to require the MaineCare program to provide reimbursement for a hearing aid for each hearing-impaired ear. Under current law, the MaineCare program provides reimbursement for only one hearing aid. This bill is a crucial step towards improving access to bilateral hearing aids.

As most of you know, I am deaf. I underwent surgery last year, and with tools, I can now hear. This has been a life-changing experience for me and for those around me. My personal journey with auditory neuropathy, a condition I likely had since birth, has been a constant struggle. The impact of not hearing properly extends far beyond the inability to recognize words. It affects every aspect of life and can lead to serious health consequences if left unaddressed.

The isolation, depression, cognitive impairment and safety concerns that come with hearing loss cannot be understated. We would never advise someone to ration their insulin, skip a day of blood pressure medicine or wear glasses with only one lens. Yet, we often suggest that people with hearing loss in both ears use only one hearing aid. This needs to change.

Hearing aid access is health care, and if it can be corrected or treated with tools, one deserves access to a full toolbox. The importance of bilateral hearing aids cannot be overstated. Using both ears is crucial for accurate sound localization, improved speech understanding, especially in noisy environments, and a more natural, balanced sound experience. It also reduces listening effort and can aid in managing tinnitus. With two hearing aids, the brain can process sounds more efficiently, reducing listening fatigue and improving overall hearing comfort. Studies

suggest that stimulating both ears with sound can enhance cognitive function, including attention and memory.

When I am not working, I work and live with individuals who have memory impairments. I have been doing this for 27 years, and I have observed how proper hearing aids can enhance cognitive function. They also help alleviate depression and encourage increased socialization.

On a personal note, as I lost my hearing, I withdrew. I became an introvert for years. I lost what I enjoyed most: listening to the service at church, audiobooks and music. The most devastating was my children's voices while I adapted to reading captions. Having hearing devices for both ears has changed my life. While my hearing is not normal, I now do hear. My balance has improved markedly. I can now tell what direction the sound is coming from. I listened to my child sing, attended a church service and cried. I get up early so I can hear the birds singing. I can cross a street without a panic attack, and I can now participate in our caucus without playing pass the mic. I still need tools because, without them, I am deaf.

Access to bilateral hearing has changed my life in ways I could not have imagined. Every deaf person deserves access to the best possible hearing experience that can be offered. I implore you all to pass this bill and help improve the lives of thousands of Mainers. This is not just a bill; it's a lifeline for those of us living with hearing loss.