

MEMORANDUM

To: Tom Friedman
From: Leslie Byrne
Subject: Presidential initiative on hearing aids for children
Date: 7/30/97

The attached Email sites a problem, I believe the President should address. It fits two consistent themes of the Administration, greater fairness in health care coverage and allowing every child to reach his or her potential.

In the area of health care, the President took the lead in proposing to stop "drive-by baby deliveries", health coverage for children of the working poor (budget bill) and tobacco use by children. In education, no one has been a stronger proponent for putting our schools on-line, standardized national testing, reading proficiency and other needed programs.

Along side putting a computer in every classroom, this may seem low tech but the President could propose that every school age hearing impaired child, must have access to hearing aids where appropriate. To accomplish this, he could make it part of his education initiative, in which the Department of Education give grants to either parents (means tested?) or a block grant to states to cover hearing aids. The other approach would be legislation to require insurance companies to cover hearing aids for children.

Mrs. Weiderhold makes a valid point about age discrimination and the harm done to hearing impaired children who cannot fully participate in the classroom with out the help of hearing aids.

I'd be interested to hear what you think of this idea as part of the President's back-to school message.

To : "'first.lady@whitehouse.gov'" <first.lady@whitehouse.gov>
Cc : "'lbyrne@os.dhhs.gov'" <lbyrne@os.dhhs.gov>,
'lsimpson@po4.ahcpr.gov'" <lsimpson@po4.ahcpr.gov>,
'anora@hrsa.dhhs.gov'" <anora@hrsa.dhhs.gov>
Bcc :
From : Raymond F Weiderhold 3rd <FREDNETHYL@prodigy.net>
Subject : lack of hearing aid coverage for children
Date : Monday, July 28, 1997 at 1:24:06 am EDT
Attach : Headers.822
Certify : N
Encrypt : N

Dear Mrs. Clinton,

I am writting to you today because my eight year old daugther, Jennifer, =
was just diagnosed with progressive bi-lateral hearing loss. To my =
surprise and dismay our insurance provider, U.S. Healthcare, does not =
cover the hearing aids that are so critical to Jennie's cognitive, =
social, and emotional development. To a child, hearing is a crucial =
method to interpret signals related to education, safety, personal =
skills, psychological growth, interaction with other children, and a =
host of other stimuli that most of us take for granted. We also =
discovered that these devices are covered under U.S. Healthcare's =
medicare policy. In other words, if she were elderly she would be =
covered, but since she is a child she is not. This sounds an awful lot =
like age discrimination to me. Her entire life is effected by this loss =
of hearing. She is a bright child, but does not do well in school =
because she cannot hear the teachers. She can't share secrets with her =
friends because if they whisper loud enough for her to hear, everyone =
else does too. If she is riding her bike she can't hear a car coming up =
behind her, and if she is far enough away she wouldn't hear me yell to =
her. =20

These are not elective devices. Nor are they cheap. The FM system that =
was recommended to us, that would give her the best result in the open =
classroom environment of her school, is \$ 1700.00 a piece. We live =
paycheck to paycheck like most families, and \$3400.00 is an impossible =
amount to come up with. Especially when the doctor wants payment in =
full up front. We can't even afford to take out a loan. As a mother =
I'm sure you can appreciate how we feel not being able to provide the =
best possible system for our child. We must settle for one basic =
hearing aid which will not eliminate the background noise in her =
classroom. To pay for it my husband worked one hundred thirty two hours =
in two weeks. =20

This is something that needs to be addressed in the health reform issues =
you are participating in. These devices are not cosmetic, they are =
necessary for her well being. We are appealing our insurance providers =
decision not to cover hearing aids. We shouldn't have to.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Joan Weiderhold