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MAJORITY LEADER NELSON ANNOUNCES FLOOR VOTE ON CHILDREN'S HEALTHCARE BILL

COCHLEAR IMPLANT LEGISLATION WILL INCREASE COVERAGE FOR CHILDREN WITH HEARING LOSS

MADISON – Assembly Majority Leader Thomas Nelson (D-Kaukauna) announced today that the full Assembly will vote on legislation expanding children's access to affordable healthcare coverage. The bill – AB-16 – will require insurance companies to cover hearing aids and cochlear implants for children under 18.

About 200 Wisconsin infants are born with permanent hearing loss every year, which can negatively impact a child's language development and academic achievement. Early intervention in the form of hearing aids and cochlear implants can greatly reduce these problems, but insurance companies in Wisconsin are not currently required to cover these expensive treatments.

"For too long, Wisconsin families have been draining their savings accounts and mortgaging their homes so they can provide their children with the treatment they need," said Rep. Nelson. "This bill is about ensuring that families have the freedom to choose the medical care that is right for their child, without worrying about how much it costs."

Special education services for children with hearing loss can range from \$5,000-\$10,000 per year, and hearing aids and cochlear implants can reduce or eliminate entirely the need for such services. In Wisconsin, this translates into a taxpayer savings of \$2 million per year at the local and state level. AB-16 has a further economic impact, in that the unemployment rate after graduation for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals is 76%. Early intervention can help children with hearing loss to gain the skills they need to compete for jobs when they grow up and enter the workforce.

"Refusing coverage for hearing aids and cochlear implants is not only wrong, but it's also penny-wise and pound foolish," continued Rep. Nelson. "This measure will save 2 million taxpayer dollars every year and will contribute to our long-term economic security by increasing opportunity and prosperity for all Wisconsin children."

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