

SCS SB 101 -- HEARING AID DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

SPONSOR: Riddle (Kelley)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 7 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Administrative Oversight by a vote of 7 to 1.

This bill requires the Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to establish, subject to appropriations, a statewide hearing aid distribution program to provide financial assistance to certain low-income individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to obtain hearing aids. All assessments for need and distribution of hearing aids shall be performed by a licensed audiologist hearing instrument specialist or licensed physician. The bill creates the "Statewide Hearing Aid Distribution Fund," which shall not include any funds from the Assistive Technology Trust Fund or the Deaf Relay Service and Equipment Distribution Program Fund. The Commission may accept gifts, donations, grants, and bequests for the program.

This bill is similar to SCS HCS HB 1868 (2018), HB 903 (2017), SB 1034 (2018), and SB 477 (2017).

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the most important reason for passing this bill is that many hearing aid manufacturers are willing to donate devices, but without this program there is no vehicle for distribution. These devices cost \$1000 each on the low end, and upwards of \$4000 for custom fitted units with the best technology. There are over 88,000 Missourians who could benefit from a program like this, and it can mean keeping people in school and in jobs.

Testifying for the bill were Senator Riddle; Rob Honan, Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living; Missouri Hearing Society; Missouri State Medical Association; Angie Esser; Missouri Speech Language Hearing Association; and Dr. Opeoluwa Sotonwa, LL.M., LP.D., Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.