

ISSUE BRIEF

Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Act

Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Tim Kaine (D-VA) introduced S. 652, the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Act of 2017 in the Senate while Representatives Brett Guthrie (R-KY) and Doris Matsui (D-CA) introduced H.R. 1539, companion legislation in the House. To ensure the continued success of existing EHDI programs, this legislation will make a number of key improvements, including expanding EHDI programs to include young children, clarifying the roles of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and improving access to appropriate follow-up and intervention services when hearing loss is identified. The bill calls for the reauthorization of the EHDI programs over the next five years.

- When the legislation was first approved in 2000, 44% of newborns were screened for hearing loss. Since the successful implementation of EHDI programs, this number has increased to approximately 97% of all newborns.
- Effective hearing screening and early intervention programs must be in place to identify hearing levels in deaf and hard of hearing newborns, infants, toddlers, and young children so that they may access appropriate early intervention programs in a timely manner. There is an urgent need to develop better systems to reduce the number of children who are lost to follow up and ensure this access to early intervention programs.
- The success of newborn, infant, and young children hearing screening programs depends on follow-up services and connecting families to early intervention programs. It is critical that these screening programs be connected to pediatric audiology services, family support, early intervention options that ensure linkage to any new and existing state-wide systems of intervention, and habilitation and rehabilitation treatment services for newborns, infants and young children who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- This bill describes the function of HRSA in developing and monitoring the efficacy of state-wide hearing screening programs and systems; the prompt evaluation and diagnosis of children referred from screening programs; and appropriate educational, audiological, and medical interventions for children confirmed to be deaf or hard of hearing.
- This bill defines the role of the CDC in the development, maintenance, and improvement of data tracking and surveillance systems on newborn, infant and young childhood hearing screenings, audiological and medical examinations, and early intervention services.
- The bill would enable the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to continue a program of research and development related to early hearing detection and intervention.
- The bill will not authorize any *new* money – instead it will be reauthorized at previous existing rates.