

**Public Testimony Before House Health and Welfare Committee
Regarding Health Care/Cytomegalovirus #S1060**

Senator Heider, Senator Souza and Members of the Committee,

My name is Claire Szewczyk and I am a first year audiology graduate student at Idaho State University. I am also one of the co-founders of the Idaho CMV Advocacy Project, a grassroots campaign that was started to spread awareness across the state.

In 2014 I was an undergraduate student at Utah State University working for the Sound Beginnings program in Logan, Utah. It was there I met and worked with Daisy, a young girl who inspired the Cytomegalovirus Public Education and Testing law for the state of Utah. I, like the majority of the hundreds of thousands of women in the state, had never heard of “Cytomegalovirus” or “CMV” before. That was until I became an employee for the Utah Department of Health.

The law that was passed by Utah directed the Department of Health to create an educational program to inform pregnant women, and women who may become pregnant, about CMV. As a former employee, I was also a part of the Cytomegalovirus Public Health Initiative and was able to see firsthand how this program impacted the state. In the three and a half years since its inception, the Utah Cytomegalovirus Public Health Initiative has provided a substantial amount of resources to women and families – everything from brochures and pamphlets for hospitals, physicians and daycares, to public transit campaigns, public service announcements, and even a public health conference. The program made such an impact to the community, I even had people who would tell me, “Oh I saw your advertisement about CMV on the bus today!” or “There were brochures about CMV at our health fair!”

Cytomegalovirus is also the number one non-genetic cause of sensorineural (inner ear) hearing loss. Outside of genetic factors, sensorineural hearing loss is the most common birth defect – with three times the prevalence of Down syndrome! Hearing loss is a very important thing to consider with the development of children. It causes delay in the development of speech and language. The language deficit causes learning problems that result in reduced academic achievement. Communication difficulties often lead to social isolation and poor self-concept, and ultimately it may play a role in vocational choices. Just think about that – Cytomegalovirus is the number one contributor to sensorineural hearing loss accounting for almost 50% of cases and sensorineural hearing loss is the number one birth defect in children. Yet only about 9% of women in the United States know what CMV it is!

It is time for Idaho to change this. We can make a difference by following suit with Utah through the passage of this bill for a CMV educational program. The consideration of this legislation would only be doing a service for the many children impacted by CMV every day. As a future audiologist, I can do nothing but advocate for this.

Thank you for the opportunity. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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