

May 1, 2017

The Honorable Michael C. Burgess
Chairman, Subcommittee on Health
House Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gene Green
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health
House Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017

Dear Chairman Burgess and Ranking Member Green,

The Consumer Technology Association (CTA)™ applauds the Subcommittee on Health for convening its May 2, 2017 hearing on "Examining Improvements to the Regulation of Medical Technologies." Specifically, CTA strongly supports the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 (H.R. 1652), as introduced by Chairman Blackburn and Representative Kennedy. As the trade association representing 2,200 world-class technology innovators, CTA has deep experience promoting technologies to change people's lives for the better. In fact, CTA's affiliated public, national CTA Foundation was launched in 2012 with the mission to link seniors and people with disabilities with technologies to enhance their lives, and providing affordable hearing solutions is an important piece of that mission.

The Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 will change lives for the better by directing the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to create a new regulatory class of hearing aids that could be sold over the counter. This new regulatory class will address the needs of adults with mild to moderate hearing loss, a population that desperately warrants attention. According to a June 2016 report published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, age-related hearing loss is an increasing public health concern as the population of older adults grows. Indeed, the NAS report, *Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability*, notes that,

"Hearing is a vital human sense that is important to communication and health and can affect quality of life. Yet for a variety of reasons, many people with hearing loss do not seek out or receive hearing health care. Estimates of hearing aid use are that 67 to 86 percent of people who may benefit from hearing aids do not use them, and many hearing assistive technologies as well as auditory rehabilitation services are not fully utilized."

Today, hearing aids range in price from \$1,000 to \$6,000, while devices such as a class of over-the-counter hearing devices are a fraction of that cost – \$100 to \$600. CTA’s own research study, *Personal Sound Amplification Products: A Study in Consumer Attitudes and Behavior*, found that most adults with hearing problems do not get the hearing assistance they need. Key barriers to addressing hearing problems include: the high cost of hearing aids, inconvenience, and the cost of doctor appointments.

The Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 would dramatically change the environment for adults suffering from mild to moderate hearing loss by allowing them easier and more affordable access to hearing assistance devices.

CTA is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to write standards for the consumer technology industry. Closed captioning is one well-known example of CTA’s important accessibility-related standards. In January 2017, CTA released ANSI/CTA-2051, *Personal Sound Amplification Performance Criteria*, which sets out minimum performance requirements to be considered a high quality OTC hearing aid. The goal is to assure the FDA and consumers that manufacturers who build to this standard have built a quality, reliable OTC hearing aid. In short, industry-led standards can help to pre-package the set of rules that the government and consumers can rely on. CTA will work with the FDA to incorporate this standard into any FDA-promulgated regulations on over-the-counter hearing aids.

The Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 will ensure that Americans with mild to moderate hearing loss get the hearing assistance they need and deserve at a reasonable and affordable price. We pledge our support and urge immediate passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Shyrie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

President & CEO

CC: The Honorable Greg Walden, Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Committee
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce Committee
Members, Subcommittee on Health, House Energy and Commerce Committee