



The Nation's Voice for People with Hearing Loss

May 1, 2017

The Honorable Michael Burgess, Chairman
The Honorable Brett Guthrie, Vice Chairman
The Honorable Gene Green, Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Burgess, Guthrie and Green:

On behalf of the nation's foremost organization representing people with hearing loss, I am pleased to offer our enthusiastic endorsement of legislation to expand access to over-the-counter hearing aids. The **"Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017" HR 1652** will dramatically improve the lives of millions of Americans living with hearing loss.

Of the estimated 30 million Americans who have age-related hearing loss, only about 14 percent of them are currently using hearing aids. The primary reason for this disparity is the high cost of hearing aids. The average cost of one hearing aid is \$2,000 and most people need two. Medicare and most insurance do not cover hearing aids. Each and every day, our office receives letters, phone calls and emails from people with hearing loss inquiring about financial assistance to purchase hearing aids, up to 10 requests a day. The financial help page on hearingloss.org is the number one visited page on HLAA's website. Sadly, there are few financial aid resources. Creating a category of over-the-counter hearing aids will go a long way toward making these essential devices affordable for the millions of Americans who need them.

The approval of over-the-counter hearing aids will also cut through the red tape and confusing federal, state and local regulations that currently make purchasing a hearing aid intimidating even for those who can afford them. As hearing aids become more affordable and easier to purchase, HLAA believes that far more Americans will take advantage of them.

The current regulatory framework regarding hearing aids was developed at a time when over-the-counter devices provided little real benefit and too often added to the frustration of those experiencing hearing loss. Technological advances in recent years have made over-the-counter hearing aids a viable option for many people with mild and moderate hearing loss.

The benefit of making hearing aids more affordable and accessible extends far beyond the well-being of the individual with hearing loss and his or her family. As more consumers with hearing loss make use of hearing aids, workers become more productive creating a potential economic benefit to the nation at large.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. The Hearing Loss Association of America and our thousands of members across the nation stand ready to work with you to see this vital legislation become law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Kelley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Barbara Kelley
Executive Director