

Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Benishek and Ranking Member Brownley for holding this hearing today. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 3508, legislation I introduced to help address the long wait times and lack of access our Veterans are facing in regard to hearing health.

Our aging and younger veterans returning from the battlefield are seeking help from the VA for hearing loss more than any other disability facing them today. The demand for audiology services is growing at nearly 10% per year. Because of this increased demand, the VA can't keep up.

Veterans across the US are being forced to wait weeks or even months for an appointment, Veterans like my constituent Roger from Marshfield. Roger is 70 years old and a Veteran of the Vietnam War. He suffers from hearing loss, and when he sought help from the VA, he was told he could not get an appointment for six months. Unfortunately, Roger couldn't wait that long, so he went to his local hearing aid specialist – and he was seen that day. Roger was willing to pay out of pocket for his hearing aids because six months was just too long to wait.

This situation is because today the VA is only allowed to use Doctors of Audiology to provide hearing services to Veterans. While audiology doctors are a great resource for the VA and provide adequate service for Veterans, there are not enough to keep up with the demand and needs of people like Roger.

Hearing aid specialists have gone through a 1-2 year apprenticeship training period, have completed a comprehensive written exam, and are certified by the state to fit and sell hearing aids. They are very qualified to support the specialized services of Audiology doctors by fitting, adjusting, and making minor repairs to hearing aids, helping to relieve the current burden Audiologists have of performing all hearing services for the VA. With the provisions of my bill in place, VA Audiologists can turn their attention to specialized cases and complex conditions, and people like Roger won't be waiting six months for hearing aids.

A recent Office of Inspector General report supported these findings: 42 percent of Veterans waited more than 30 days from the time the medical facility received the hearing aids to the time they were mailed back to the Veteran and blames the delay in repairs on staff vacancies and an increase in workload. My bill would also allow the VA to fill those staff vacancies with specialists certified for adjusting and repairing hearing aids.

H.R. 3508 has the support of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the International Hearing Society, VetsFirst, Blinded Veterans Association, and American Veterans.

As Americans, we can never repay our debt to Veterans like Roger, but Congress can pass common-sense measures like H.R. 3508 to help make their lives back home a little easier. I urge the Committee to pass my legislation quickly and appreciate your support today.

I yield back the balance of my time.