

Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to share Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Alliance's stance on H.R. 353, before you today.

Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Alliance (COVVHA) is committed to serving as a voice for the children of Vietnam veterans, including second and third generation victims of Agent Orange and Dioxin Exposures worldwide. We believe in empowering each other to hold the companies and governments responsible for causing so much devastation and suffering to our generations.

On behalf of COVVHA, I am writing to express our appreciation for the House Veteran's Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Health's efforts on H.R. 353, which would increase veterans' access to hearing healthcare services by enhancing the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) ability to utilize hearing aid specialists.

In a February 2014 audit of hearing aid services, the VA's Office of Inspector General found that new hearing aids were not being issued in a timely manner and that the VA was failing to meet its five day timeliness goal. Inadequate staffing was partially attributed to the delays in hearing service.

It is particularly troubling that the VA has not created an appropriate staffing model to meet the ever growing need for hearing services amongst veterans. With hearing loss and Tinnitus continuing to be the most prevalent service-connected disabilities affected veterans who receive disability compensation, failure to adjust staffing is unacceptable.

This legislation would allow the VA to hire hearing aid specialists – an ability the VA currently does not have the authority to do – and ask that the VA report back to Congress on an annual basis regarding wait times and the number of audiologists, hearing aid specialists and hearing techs hired by the VA. It truly is a common sense piece of legislation that would help deal with the current backlog faced by many of our nation's veterans.

As you may be aware, COVVHA expressed our support for H.R. 353 in a letter addressed to Congressmen Duffy, Ruiz, and Walz on following the bills introduction in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress and we continue to strongly support the bill. We believe that passage of this bill will help those Veterans in need of hearing aids, who are unable to access them due to physical limitations, long distances to VA facilities, and long wait times for appointments.

Sincerely,

Kelly L. Derricks  
Founder and President  
Daughter of Vietnam Veteran Harry C. Mackel, Jr., U.S. Air Force (deceased)