

**AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
TO H.R. 353
OFFERED BY MR. BENISHEK OF MICHIGAN**

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

1 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

2 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans’ Access to
3 Hearing Health Act of 2016”.

**4 SEC. 2. APPOINTMENT OF LICENSED HEARING AID SPE-
5 CIALISTS IN VETERANS HEALTH ADMINIS-
6 TRATION.**

7 (a) LICENSED HEARING AID SPECIALISTS.—

8 (1) APPOINTMENT.—Section 7401(3) of title
9 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting “li-
10 censed hearing aid specialists,” after “Audiol-
11 ogists,”.

12 (2) QUALIFICATIONS.—Section 7402(b)(14) of
13 such title is amended by inserting “hearing aid spe-
14 cialist” after “dental technologist”.

15 (b) HANDBOOK.—Not later than 180 days after the
16 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall up-
17 date and reissue the handbook of the Veteran Health Ad-
18 ministration numbered 1170.02 and titled “VHA Audi-

1 ology and Speech-Language Pathology Services” to reflect
2 the requirements made by this section or the amendments
3 under this section. Such updates shall include—

4 (1) a requirement that a hearing aid specialist
5 may only perform hearing services consistent with
6 the hearing aid specialist’s State license related to
7 the practice of fitting and dispensing hearing aids
8 without excluding other qualified professionals, in-
9 cluding audiologists, from rendering services in over-
10 lapping practice areas;

11 (2) a requirement that services provided to vet-
12 erans by hearing aid specialists shall be provided as
13 part of the treatment plan developed by an audiol-
14 ogist; and

15 (3) a requirement that the medical facilities of
16 the Department of Veterans Affairs ensure veterans
17 have access to the full range of professional services
18 provided by an audiologist.

19 (c) CONSULTATION.—In determining the qualifica-
20 tions required for hearing aid specialists and in carrying
21 out subsection (b), the Secretary shall consult with vet-
22 erans service organizations and other stakeholder and in-
23 dustry groups as the Secretary determines appropriate.

24 (d) ANNUAL REPORT.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, and an-
3 nually thereafter during the five-year period begin-
4 ning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the
5 Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Con-
6 gress a report on the following:

7 (A) Timely access of veterans to hearing
8 health services through the Department of Vet-
9 erans Affairs.

10 (B) Contracting policies of the Department
11 with respect to providing hearing health serv-
12 ices to veterans in facilities that are not facili-
13 ties of the Department.

14 (2) TIMELY ACCESS TO SERVICES.—Each re-
15 port shall, with respect to the matter specified in
16 paragraph (1)(A) for the one-year period preceding
17 the submittal of such report, include the following:

18 (A) The staffing levels of audiologists,
19 hearing aid specialists, and health technicians
20 in audiology in the Veterans Health Adminis-
21 tration.

22 (B) A description of the metrics used by
23 the Secretary in measuring performance with
24 respect to appointments and care relating to
25 hearing health.

1 (C) The average time that a veteran waits
2 to receive an appointment, beginning on the
3 date on which the veteran makes the request,
4 for the following:

5 (i) A disability rating evaluation for a
6 hearing-related disability.

7 (ii) A hearing aid evaluation.

8 (iii) Dispensing of hearing aids.

9 (iv) Any follow-up hearing health ap-
10 pointment.

11 (D) The percentage of veterans whose total
12 wait time for appointments described in sub-
13 paragraph (C), including an initial and follow-
14 up appointment, if applicable, is more than 30
15 days.

16 (3) CONTRACTING POLICIES.—Each report
17 shall, with respect to the matter specified in para-
18 graph (1)(B) for the one-year period preceding the
19 submittal of such report, include the following:

20 (A) The number of veterans that the Sec-
21 retary refers to non-Department audiologists
22 for hearing health care appointments.

23 (B) The number of veterans that the Sec-
24 retary refers to non-Department hearing aid
25 specialists for follow-up appointments for a

1 hearing aid evaluation, the dispensing of hear-
2 ing aids, or any other purpose relating to hear-
3 ing health.

