

July 15, 2017

Senator Maria Cantwell
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Cantwell and Murray,

On behalf of the Washington State Association of the Hearing Loss Association of America, I urge you to support the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 (S. 670). This legislation was introduced by Senator Warren and is co-sponsored by Senators Collins, Grassley, Hassan, Isakson and McCaskill. Please also oppose any efforts to weaken the language of this important legislation. The House passed an identical bill (H.R. 1652) this past week.

Americans with hearing loss deserve an improved quality of life and the opportunity to stay active and engaged. Some 48 million Americans report having hearing loss, but studies show that only about 20% of people that would benefit from hearing aids have them. Although low rates for adoption and utilization of hearing aids are the result of multiple factors, cost and social stigma are among the most important. For people with mild to moderate hearing loss, and who are 18 or more years old, the proposed Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 would create a critical new avenue for obtaining help.

Being able to buy hearing aids over the counter will improve the lives of millions of Americans who want help for their hearing loss but can't afford hearing aids as they are currently provided.

- It is difficult to comprehend how advanced devices, such as the latest smartphone or a high-end laptop, cost less than \$1,000, while the average price of one hearing aid exceeds \$2,000.
- Medicare does not cover hearing aids, Medicaid in Washington State covers hearing aids only for children, and most private insurance plans provide very limited or no benefits for hearing aids.
- Regulatory change that allows hearing aids to be sold over the counter will create competition and reduce the price of hearing aids.
- We believe the proposed legislation also will spur innovation by hearing aid manufacturers, and will bring companies such as manufacturers of sophisticated audio equipment into the hearing aid market.

Being able to buy hearing aids over the counter also will serve to reduce the social stigma associated with hearing loss.

- Inaccurately perceived purely as an age-related condition, hearing loss retains a negative association with mental acuity.
- While non-prescription reading glasses and many other health-related devices are easily acquired through multiple retail channels, hearing aids are difficult to obtain. The complexity involved in obtaining hearing aids heightens the social stigma associated with hearing loss.
- Hearing aid manufacturers and dispensers tout the “invisibility” of a hearing aid as a key consideration for consumers. Devices purchased over the counter will start to reduce the stigma associated with hearing aids purchases.

For some people with hearing loss, the intervention of an audiologist or other health professional is essential and will significantly improve the outcome of their hearing aid acquisition. As highlighted in the proposed legislation, particular care must be taken with the hearing assistance provided to children. But for many adults, hearing aids available over the counter will become financially attainable and greatly beneficial. This legislation also ensures safety for consumers – requiring the FDA to issue safety and labeling requirements for hearing aids sold over the counter.

Please support people with hearing loss in Washington State by co-sponsoring and voting for the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017. Washingtonians with mild and moderate hearing loss should have the option of buying hearing aids appropriate for them over the counter.

Thank you for your consideration,



Warren Weissman, President
Washington State Association
Hearing Loss Association of America