



February 22, 2019

Re: HB 1078/SB 5210 Consumer Telecoil-Bluetooth Education bills

Dear Washington State Legislators,

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), located in Bethesda, Maryland, is the nation's leading consumer based organization serving the estimated 48 million Americans with hearing loss. HLAA has a strong interest in legislation at the state level that affects the needs and concerns of people with hearing loss. I am writing in regard to bills introduced in your state legislature that could help ensure that Washington residents being treated for hearing loss are fully informed of their options prior to purchasing expensive hearing aids. The Consumer Telecoil-Bluetooth Education bills require audiologists and hearing aid dispensers to explain telecoils and Bluetooth options to their patients and customers prior to initial fitting and purchase. This vital information can change the life of a person with hearing loss. HLAA supports HB 1078/SB 5210.

It is important to know, that while the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that public places have assistive listening systems, without a telecoil in the hearing aid and instructions on how to use it, people cannot easily connect to the FM, IR, or hearing loop assistive listening systems that meet ADA requirements. Without the telecoil and those systems, people with hearing loss are simply unable to participate equally in the programs and services of state and city governments, and in public environments such as medical centers, conference rooms, transportation hubs, lecture halls and classrooms, retirement community public rooms, banks, entertainment venues and places of worship.

Bluetooth serves an equally important, but very different purpose in the lives of people with hearing loss. Where telecoils provide a one-to-many solution as described above, Bluetooth technology provides a one-to-one solution – delivering enhanced audio streaming from personal technology devices to individuals with Bluetooth-enabled hearing devices.

Simply put, people cannot use the technology that could change their lives if they are not informed about it. Buying hearing aids can be an overwhelming, confusing and expensive process, and the onus should not be on consumers to ask about telecoil and Bluetooth options; the responsibility belongs to audiologists and hearing aid dispensers. We hope that Washington State joins Utah, Arizona, Delaware, New York, Florida, and Rhode Island in ensuring that people with hearing loss have the education and information they need to buy the best hearing aid for their needs and to make the most of their hearing aid investment.

One of our missions at HLAA is to help people live independently with their hearing loss. We believe that the Telecoil-Bluetooth Education bills will go a long way toward doing that.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Kelley".

Barbara Kelley
Executive Director