



James Firman, Chair

June 14, 2017

The Honorable Joseph P. Kennedy, III
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Earl L. “Buddy” Carter
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kennedy, Blackburn and Carter:

The Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) is a coalition of 72 national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America’s older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy-making arena.

We are writing in strong support of H. R. 1652, the “Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017,” which would provide access to more affordable hearing aids for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. This would help with the out-of-pocket costs many seniors face due to gaps in Medicare coverage for hearing, vision and dental care.

Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic health condition facing older adults. Yet 70 percent of Americans between age 65 and 84 with hearing loss are not using hearing aids because Medicare does not cover them. Even fewer adults aged 20 to 69 (approximately 16 percent) who could benefit from wearing hearing aids have ever used them. Paying out-of-pocket for the devices – at an average cost of \$2,400 per hearing aid - is too expensive for many people.

For older adults, the ramifications of going without hearing aids can be tragic in terms of decreased quality of life; increased falls; and the inability to effectively interact with health care professionals, family, friends, and others during daily activities. Safety risks are increased when someone cannot hear a car coming, hear the phone ringing or an alarm going off. And, according to Dr. Frank Lin – an ear, nose and throat clinician and scientist at Johns Hopkins University – isolation due to untreated hearing loss may be linked to the early onset of dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

Your bill, the “Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017,” would implement recommendations from the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology’s (PCAST) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in their report “Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability” to make certain types of hearing aids available over the counter. This would encourage the development of hearing devices that would be accessible and affordable for millions of Americans affected by hearing impairment.

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LCAO members thank you for your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working with you as the “Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017” moves through the legislative process. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact LCAO@NCOA.org.

Sincerely,

AARP

Aging Life Care Association®

Alliance for Aging Research

Alliance for Retired Americans

American Federation of Teachers

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)

American Society on Aging (ASA)

Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores (ANPPM), National Association for Hispanic Elderly

Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historically Black Colleges and

Universities (AGHDHBCU)

Association of Jewish Aging Services of North America (AJAS)

B’nai B’rith International

Center for Elder Care & Advanced Illness, Altarum Institute

Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.

Easter Seals

The Gerontological Society of America (GSA)

International Association for Indigenous Aging

Justice in Aging

LeadingAge

Lutheran Services in America (LSA)

Medicare Rights Center

National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA)

National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE)

National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)

National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA)

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)

National Association for Home Care & Hospice

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (NASOP)

National Caucus and Center on Black Aging, Inc.

National Center for Creative Aging

National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

National Council on Aging

National Hispanic Council on Aging (NHCOA)

National Senior Corps Association (NSCA)

Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI)

Social Security Works

Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)