



January 28, 2016

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to ask for your support of House Bill 70 and Senate bill 70, legislation pre-filed for the 2016 short session of the legislature, that would require hearing aid providers to counsel clients on the benefits of technology that meets the requirement for hearing aid compatibility with assistive listening systems mandated under the terms of the 2010 revisions to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

I have been an audiologist since 1974, first working in private practices and hospitals and then at Gallaudet University (32 years) where I developed a required curriculum to teach new audiologists best practices for providing full hearing access at home, in the workplace and in the community. It was at Gallaudet that I also founded the nation's first university-sponsored Assistive Listening Devices Center. Currently I am the CEO of Compton-Conley Consulting, LLC, a firm providing hearing enhancement solutions to individuals, institutions, corporations and government agencies. I also hold the position of Director of Consumer Initiatives for the Hearing Loss Association of America.

My career's focus on needs assessment, assistive technology and consumerism came about due to my early work with clients. Like most audiologists, I was taught that the hearing aid is the solution to hearing loss. My education did not include how assistive listening devices can dramatically improve people's ability to hear and understand at a distance and in noisy and reverberant settings. And I certainly was not taught about the importance of telecoils. Luckily, serendipity made an appearance. I came across an article on assistive devices, buried in the back of a hearing aid manual. Being a curious person, I read the article and ordered the equipment necessary for connecting hearing aid users to their TVs and music players. I also ordered a wireless FM system. I then contacted 20 of my clients who wore hearing aids (fitted by me), but who could not attend the theater or a public meeting because their hearing aids alone were insufficient.

All 20 of these individuals had telecoils that they used when on the phone. However, I then instructed each client on how the telecoil could also be used to link to assistive listening devices. I witnessed, first hand, the happy tears of amazement when these individuals could finally hear the television, a music player and my voice from across the room. These same individuals also reported that the telecoil allowed them to finally gain full communication access to movie theaters, lecture hall and public meeting halls within their communities. That powerful experience taught me to alter my way of doing things. From then on I always assessed people's listening needs thoroughly and provided counseling concerning benefits of telecoils. Everyone in our clinic began counseling this way and the result was astounding. Our hearing aid return rate decreased from 5% (the industry average has steadily hovered at 20-23% for 40 years) to 0% and our referrals increased significantly. We learned that if you provide patient-centered care with the goal of providing full communication access, people will respond with delight.

A properly programmed telecoil is the necessary link between hearing aids and assistive listening systems installed in public and private areas. Even if a client uses a modern hearing aid streamer (which sends a proprietary radio wave to the hearing aids), the streamer must contain a telecoil so that it can receive the signal from the large area system and relay it to the hearing aids. **In the future we may have Wi-Fi and other modes of wireless links, but until the day that everyone can benefit from that technology, we absolutely need to tell clients about telecoils.**

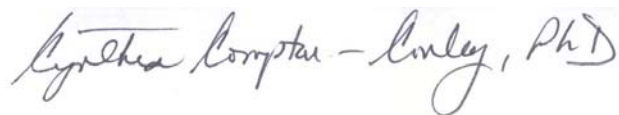
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is meaningless to people with hearing loss if they cannot benefit from the technology recommended in that legislation. Not counseling a client about the possible need for a telecoil is akin to giving someone a car without a tank of gas. Further, it is my professional opinion that to not counsel someone on the merits of telecoils and other technologies designed to provide full communication access is malpractice.

While hearing aids can certainly help, they are not some magical potion that will solve all of a person's listening needs. Research has supported this viewpoint. It is time that hearing health care providers abandon a hearing aid-centric paradigm embrace a practice model that places the consumer's communication needs front and center. This article explains how:

http://www.hearingloss.org/sites/default/files/docs/HLM_JulAug2015_Compton-Conley.pdf

Finally, do not be misled by the misinformation existing within this arena. As legislators, I'm sure you are being lobbied by others who have proclaimed that telecoils are old fashioned and not needed – and that Bluetooth and other technologies are more modern. Don't believe it. Nothing could be further from the truth. While telecoil technology has been around from some time, no other technology provides universal and inexpensive access like the telecoil. Until we have something better (and we will someday), it behooves us to tell people about it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cynthia Compton-Conley, PhD". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Cynthia Compton-Conley, Ph.D.
CEO, Compton-Conley Consulting, LLC
Director, Consumer Technology Initiatives,
Hearing Loss Assoc. of America