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Open Letter to Members of the New Mexico Legislature

When purchasing my first pair of hearing aids the option of telecoil technology and its many applications for increasing the functionality of my hearing aids was never mentioned by the hearing care provider who sold them to me. I learned about them from others in the room when I attended my first Hearing Loss Association meeting in Albuquerque. When my brother-in-law in Nebraska purchased his first pair of hearing aids he experienced the same thing and only learned later (from me) about telecoils.

During my many years as an advocate for the hard of hearing, as a counselor for those with hearing loss, and through attendance at national hearing loss conferences, I have found that this is a major problem throughout the country with what appears to be a majority of clients never being told about the technology even though it's present in over 70% of current hearing aid models. The first question asked by many when told of this situation is, "Why do providers not tell people about this technology" and, quite frankly there is no answer other than, "I honestly don't know."

Some providers will say, "It's old technology and I tell my clients about Bluetooth® and other new technology" but that is disingenuous as Bluetooth® and the other technologies they tell people about will not work in large assembly areas like churches, theaters, legislative chambers etc.. Telecoils do serve such audiences and that's the reason assistive listen systems that incorporate this technology are now mandated by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

Some will say, "I don't tell them about telecoils because they have no place to use them" but that, too is not accurate. Their original use was to hear better on the telephone with the telcoil connecting to the magnet in the earpiece of the phone. That use still exists. Further, there are over 100 churches, theaters, meeting rooms in New Mexico that have hearing loops to broadcast to telecoils. People, if told of the technology, can install a hearing loop in their home TV room. They can use a neck loop instead of a headset to hear music on their MP3 player or any other sound producing device in place of a headset. A neck loop can replace earphones in almost any application and provide better quality sound, customized to match the user's hearing loss pattern.

Many providers, when asked, will say, "Oh, I always tell my clients about telecoils" yet when many of those clients show up at Hearing Loss Association meetings and are told to turn on their telecoils to hear the speaker better, they say, "What's a telecoil?"

I urge you to talk with those you know who wear hearing aids. Ask if they know about telecoils and I believe you will find that many, if not most, will ask you, "What's a telecoil?" and thus demonstrate the need for New Mexico to follow the lead of Utah, Arizona, New York, Florida and Rhode Island in mandating that counseling on telecoil technology that works with ADA mandated assistive listening systems must be included in the statutory scope of practice for audiologists and hearing aid dispensers in New Mexico.

