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August 14, 2018

To Whom It May Concern,

As an audiologist with over 30 years of experience, I retired to become a consumer advocate with the Hearing Loss Association of America, a non-profit consumer support organization. In that capacity I travel the country to educate consumers about hearing loss, how to negotiate the hearing healthcare field to ensure they purchase hearing aids with useful features. I also serve as the hearing loop support person for the over 200 hearing loss support groups around the US. In my position I see the effects of hearing loss not only in my community, but around the country, every day. It is my sincere hope that you will act on behalf of the constituents with hearing loss in New Mexico by supporting amendment of the New Mexico Speech-Language Pathology, Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensing Practices Act to require the counseling of clients about hearing aids that work with the assistive listening systems that are mandated by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

The ADA requires that assistive listening systems be installed in public venues. The proposed amendment would provide equal access to communication in those venues through technology for people with hearing loss, ensuring that consumers are guaranteed to receive all of the information necessary to make a truly informed decision regarding the purchase of hearing aids and armed with the knowledge needed to protect and understand their civil rights.

As I travel around the country I see too many customers who were not informed about technology that allows them to participate in public events like concerts, theaters, legislative meetings, funerals and house of worship services. Lack of this knowledge leads to living isolated lives. Members of the Hearing Loss of America support groups tell me that the issue they most frequently have to address when new members show up in their meetings, is the issue of telecoils. Too many consumers have no idea that their hearing aids have this feature inside. Too often the telecoil, even for those with severe hearing loss, is not activated and the consumer was never even trained in how to use this simple but effective feature for hearing on the phone (hence the name tele - short for telephone - coil).

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For these reasons I wholeheartedly endorse amendment of the New Mexico Speech Language Pathology, Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensing Practices Act to include counseling on hearing aid technology available to access ADA required assistive listening systems.

Why do we need the state to help in this matter? The same reasons that the state has provided protection for consumers who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the areas of fair housing, certification of interpreter law, and workplace protection. Most hearing care providers act in good conscience, but it is imperative to ensure that everyone receive the same quality of care.

Sincerely,

*Juliette Sterkens, AuD*

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UWO - Distinguished Alumnus Award 2015  
Arizona School of Health Sciences - Humanitarian of the Year 2013  
Academy of Doctors of Audiology - Leo Doerfler Award 2013  
Wisconsin Audiologist of the Year 2011  
Larry Mauldin Award 2011  
American Academy of Audiology - Presidential Award 2011