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2012 IHS State Chapter of the Year

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May 2015

TO: New Jersey Congressional Delegation

FR: Daniel Berke, President
New Jersey Association of Hearing Health Professionals

RE: In support of S. 564 / H.R. 353, Veterans' Access to Hearing Health Act of 2015

As the New Jersey Association of Hearing Health Professionals (NJAHHP) we represent licensed hearing instrument dispensers within NJ, including hearing aid specialists and dispensing audiologists. Nearly all of us work every day with the hearing impaired and have the honor of helping those who have served our country. Hearing loss is a serious challenge faced by many veterans, which can cause strained relationships, heighten stress, cause fatigue, reduce income, and make it difficult to maintain a career.

Veterans' need for quality hearing healthcare is significant and growing. Aging veterans are experiencing hearing loss at increasing rates, resulting in a greater reliance on the VA for hearing healthcare. While most are aware of access to hearing healthcare via the VA, there are some inadequacies resulting in a lower standard of hearing healthcare. Every day in our practices throughout the US, we take care of veterans who are eligible for hearing healthcare through the VA.

It is evident that while the VA does provide a valuable and necessary product and limited service, there are certainly some shortfalls within the VA regarding hearing healthcare including:

- The extensive VA backlog for hearing evaluations and hearing aid services is a major impediment to accessing timely care
- Many Veterans are purchasing hearing aids from local providers at their own expense rather than dealing with the VA due to:
 - Long wait times to get appointments
 - Extensive time spent traveling to the nearest VA clinic
 - Limited follow-up service

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New Jersey Association of Hearing Health Professionals

- Often, Veterans getting hearing healthcare through the VA do **not** receive:
 - Proper hearing aid training on basic functions
 - Adequate follow-up care, which should include programming and fit adjustments
 - Adequate rehabilitation and counseling to ensure success

As professionals licensed in our state, we know that satisfaction with hearing aids and ultimately the best possible hearing is achieved when the right mixture of professional ability, follow up care, and availability to deal with issues occurs.

The current VA hearing healthcare delivery model however, simply does not allow for all necessary steps to occur in the hearing healthcare puzzle, resulting in many veterans being underserved and consequently seeking help in the private sector. However, groundbreaking legislation has been introduced to improve the hearing healthcare system.

Proposed legislation H.R. 3508/S. 2311 will ensure that America's Veterans have convenient, timely access to high quality hearing healthcare by:

- Giving the VA the ability to hire hearing aid specialists internally
- Hold the VA accountable by requiring it to report annually to Congress on appointment wait times and network provider utilization rates

Hearing aid specialists are properly equipped to provide effective solutions to the challenges of getting America's hearing healthcare they deserve. Hearing aid specialists stand ready to offer Veterans comprehensive quality hearing healthcare, including: hearing testing, determining candidacy for hearing aids, performing fittings, providing hearing aid recommendations, performing adjustments and repairs, taking ear impressions for ear molds, providing counseling and aural rehabilitation .

By expanding the VA network to include hearing aid specialists as VA providers, the VA stands to be much better equipped to meet these needs better and faster.

As united professionals in the state of New Jersey, we ask for your bipartisan support of S. 564 / H.R. 353.

With questions, you can contact me at dan@ahrenshearing.com or (201) 794-0120. Thank you for your consideration.