

ConsumersUnion®

POLICY & ACTION FROM CONSUMER REPORTS

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

May 1, 2017

Dear Senator:

On behalf of Consumers Union, the public policy arm of nonprofit Consumer Reports, we write to express our support of S. 670, the “Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017.” As we noted in our recent article in the March 2017 issue of Consumer Reports,¹ price considerations keep many Americans from getting hearing assistance instruments that they need. This legislation will help make hearing aids available to consumers more conveniently and affordably and help improve their quality of life.

S. 670 would broaden the range of hearing aids available over the counter to adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. These devices would then be available for purchase separately from medical evaluations and services, giving consumers more options, including more affordable options. According to a 2015 survey of Consumer Reports subscribers, half of the respondents reported having trouble hearing in noisy environments, yet only 25% had their hearing checked the previous year. The Archives of Internal Medicine published research that finds that just 14% of consumers who could benefit from hearing aids actually use them.

Cost is a major concern as the price of hearing aids can range between \$3,000 and \$8,000 and is not covered by Medicare or most commercial insurance plans. Many seniors and others with hearing loss who could benefit from these devices simply cannot afford them. We believe S.670 would preserve and reinforce important consumer safety protections, including state laws holding manufacturers responsible for harm caused by unsafe and defective products, while overriding state laws designed to block or impede consumer access to over-the-counter hearing aids. The legislation requires the FDA to establish standards for these over the counter products that would address safety and efficacy and appropriate labeling.

We continue to encourage consumers to seek medical evaluation before purchasing a hearing aid, to rule out other possible medical issues, yet we think consumers can benefit from a system in which the medical evaluation is separated from the purchase of the device. This gives consumers the ability to make their own choices, to shop around for medical services and hearing aids that best suit their needs and their budget.

We look forward to working with you and your cosponsors to enact this beneficial, common sense consumer legislation into law. Thank you for your attention on this important issue.

¹Insights: No More Suffering in Silence?, Consumer Reports, March 2017.

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Sincerely,

George Slover

Lisa McGiffert

Victoria Burack

Cc: Senate HELP Committee