

February 25, 2015

Representative Amy Carter (175th District)
245 State Capitol
Atlanta GA 30334

RE: HB 232: Proposed Changes to the Georgia State Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Dispensers

Dear Representative Carter:

The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by, and for audiologists. The American Academy of Audiology (the "Academy") promotes quality hearing and balance care by advancing the profession of audiology through leadership, advocacy, education, public awareness, and support of research. On behalf of over 12,000 members, including 200 audiologist members in the state of Georgia, the Academy would like to express its concerns over HB 232.

If enacted, HB 232 would change certain provisions related to the State Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Dispensers (the Board). The Academy is especially concerned regarding the proposed changes that would modify the Board's composition, namely the removal of the licensed audiologist from the Board. The Academy believes that such a change could adversely affect how the Board evaluates consumer complaints related to the fitting and sale of hearing aids, resulting in an overall decline in consumer protection protocols and creating a potentially negative experience for the user of hearing aids.

In Georgia, as well as within other states, there are multiple specialties permitted to dispense hearing aids pursuant to state law. These specialties include otolaryngologists, audiologists, and hearing aid dealers/dispensers. Of those specialties, audiologists have extensive educational knowledge and specialized clinical experience in providing a full range of audiologic treatment services for persons with hearing loss, including evaluation, fitting, and verification of amplification devices. This comprehensive knowledge and expertise demonstrates that audiologists are highly trained and uniquely qualified to thoroughly evaluate consumer complaints, specifically regarding the auditory system. The Academy firmly believes that having an audiologist serve as a member of the State Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Dispensers ensures that the highest quality standards in consumer protection are being met- a right that every consumer deserves. The Academy would also like to stress that the mission of the Board is

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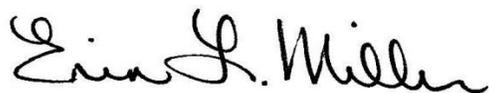
to provide consumer protection and oversight, not to promote business development. The multiple specialties represented on the Board are appointed to protect the interests of the consumer, not to engage in competitive business practices.

In addition to raising concerns regarding consumer protection and the appropriate handling and evaluation of complaints, this action also represents a departure from the hearing aid board composition models utilized by most of the states. Of the states that have independent hearing aid dispensing boards, the vast majority (approximately 70 percent) have an audiologist member on their board.

The Academy strongly values and upholds safeguards for consumers purchasing hearing aids, and recognizes the state of Georgia as a leader in protecting the rights of health care consumers. As such, the American Academy of Audiology strongly opposes HB 232 and any proposed changes to current Georgia law that would modify essential consumer protections related to the dispensing of hearing aids.

Please contact Kate Thomas, director of payment policy and legislative affairs at 703-226-1029 or kthomas@audiology.org should you need additional information or clarification regarding the Academy's position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erin L. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erin L. Miller, AuD
President
American Academy of Audiology

cc: Secretary of State Brian Kemp c/o Chuck Harper
Representative John Corbett (174th District)
Representative Howard Maxwell (17th District)
Representative Jason Shaw (176th District)