



COMMISSION ON AGING

March 3, 2020

The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser, Chair
House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB1326: Sales and Use Tax–Exemption for Artificial Hearing Device Earmolds, Equipment and Supplies

Dear Delegate Kaiser:

I am writing on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging to express our support for HB 1326. The Commission on Aging was established in 1974 to advise County government on the needs, interests, and issues of older adult residents, and to advocate on their behalf.

HB 1326 would exempt from the sales and use tax, the sale of custom-made earmolds for artificial hearing devices and any other artificial hearing device-related equipment and supplies. In so doing, it would treat hearing devices like other medical devices (including prescription eyeglasses) and would also bring Maryland policy on this issue into line with numerous other states.

According to the Hearing Loss Association of America, an estimated 48 million Americans – more than 15% of the population – experience some degree of hearing loss. This includes approximately 30% of people in their 50s, 45% of people in their 60s, and more than two thirds of people in their 70s. However, fewer than 20% of people who could benefit from a hearing aid or other device actually use one. In addition, people tend to wait on average of seven years from the time they start noticing hearing loss to the time they seek help. For older adults, one factor in the failure to use a hearing device is stigma. Another factor is cost, since these devices are not covered expenses under Medicare.

Recent studies reveal that untreated hearing loss is associated with a greater risk of depression, dementia and other cognitive impairment, and falls. People with untreated hearing loss may avoid or withdraw from social situations. Studies also show that those with untreated hearing loss experience higher total health care costs and more hospital stays and have a higher risk of being readmitted to the hospital within 30 days, compared to those without hearing loss.

Although most hearing loss cannot be reversed, it can be successfully addressed and managed to improve quality of life. Hearing technologies have advanced dramatically in recent years, and they continue to improve. By exempting artificial hearing device earmolds, equipment, and supplies from sales and use taxes, HB 1326 takes a significant step towards easing some of the financial burden of these devices for a significant number of Marylanders.

We urge your support for this bill and thank you for your consideration of the Commission on Aging's position.

Sincerely,

Jean Dinwiddie, Chair

cc: Delegate Jason Buckel
Delegate Eric Luedtke
Montgomery County Delegation