

July 16, 2021

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Committee Leaders,

On May 20, 2021, legislation (S. 1731) was introduced in the U.S. Senate that would inappropriately provide audiologists with unlimited direct access to Medicare patients without a physician referral and amend Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide “practitioner” status for audiologists under the Medicare program. The undersigned groups **strongly urge you to oppose S. 1731**.

Through your leadership in the United States Senate, we know you work tirelessly to protect patient safety and provide the highest quality healthcare for Medicare beneficiaries. Bypassing a physician evaluation and referral can lead to delayed or incorrect diagnoses resulting in failure to treat reversible causes of hearing loss or inappropriate treatment that could cause lasting harm and increased costs to patients. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has maintained a position that physician referral is a “key means by which the Medicare program assures that beneficiaries are receiving medically necessary services, and avoids potential payment for asymptomatic screening tests that are not covered by Medicare...”

While audiologists are valued health professionals who work for and with physicians, they do not possess the medical training necessary to perform the same duties as physicians, nor are they able to provide patients with the medical diagnosis and full spectrum of treatment options they require. Audiologists are not physicians and should not be treated as such under the Medicare program. A physician-led hearing healthcare team, with coordination of services, is the best approach for providing the highest quality care to patients.

With the FDA’s delayed release of regulations regarding the sale of over-the-counter hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss, this legislation has the potential to generate further confusion at a time when the established care continuum for hearing health is poised to change significantly for America’s seniors. The direct access created by S. 1731 will create dangerous patient safety concerns and overall ambiguity regarding the qualifications and training of various healthcare providers.

For the above-stated reasons, **we respectfully urge you to oppose any efforts to advance S. 1731**. Thank you for your consideration, and please contact the American Academy of Otolaryngology- Head and Neck Surgery at govtaffairs@entnet.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

National Organizations
Administrator Support Community for ENT (ASCENT)
American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
American Academy of Neurology

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy
American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
American College of Rheumatology
American College of Surgeons
American Medical Association
American Neurotology Society
American Osteopathic Association
American Osteopathic College of Otolaryngology
American Otological Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Rhinologic Society
American Society of Anesthesiologists
American Society of Breast Surgeons
American Society of Pediatric Otolaryngology
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
Association of Academic Departments of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Harry Barnes Society
Otolaryngology and Allergy Specialists – Integrated Solutions (OASIS)
National Association of Spine Specialists

State and Local Medical Associations

Alaska State Medical Association
Arizona Medical Association
Arkansas Medical Society
California Medical Association
Connecticut State Medical Society
Colorado Medical Society
Florida Medical Association
Hawaii Medical Association
Indiana State Medical Association
Kentucky Medical Association
Maryland State Medical Society
Massachusetts Medical Society
Medical Association of Alabama
Medical Association of Georgia
Medical Society of DC
Medical Society of Delaware
Medical Society of the State of New York
Medical Society of Virginia
Michigan State Medical Society
Minnesota Medical Association
Mississippi State Medical Association
Missouri State Medical Association
Montana Medical Association
Nebraska Medical Association
New Mexico Medical Society

North Carolina Medical Society
North Dakota Medical Association
Ohio State Medical Association
Pennsylvania Medical Society
South Carolina Medical Association
South Dakota State Medical Association
Tennessee Medical Association
Texas Medical Association
Utah Medical Association
Vermont Medical Society
Washington State Medical Association
Wisconsin Medical Society
Wyoming Medical Society

State and Local Specialty Societies

Alabama Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Arizona Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Arkansas Society of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery
California Otolaryngology Society
Colorado ENT Society
Connecticut ENT Society
Delaware Academy of Otolaryngology
East Tennessee Otolaryngology Society
Florida Society of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (FSFPRS)
Florida Society of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery (FSO-HNS)
Georgia Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Greater Miami ENT Society
Houston Society of Otolaryngology – HNS
Indiana Society of Otorhinolaryngology
Kansas Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery
Long Island Society of Otolaryngology
Louisiana Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Maine Society of Otolaryngology
Maryland Society of Otolaryngology
Massachusetts Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Memphis Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Metro Atlanta Educational Society for Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery
Michigan Otolaryngological Society
Minnesota Academy of Otolaryngology
Mississippi Society of Otolaryngology, Head & Neck Surgery
Nebraska Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
New York Otologic Society
New York State Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
North Carolina Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Northwest Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Orange County Society for Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery
Oregon Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Pennsylvania Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Puerto Rico Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgeons
San Diego Otolaryngology Society
San Francisco Bay Area ENT Society

Santa Barbara Otolaryngology Society
South Carolina Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Texas Association of Otolaryngology
Tidewater Otolaryngology Society
Utah Society of Otolaryngology
Vermont Otolaryngology Society
Virginia Society of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
Wisconsin Society of Otolaryngology