

Testimony before the Insurance
and Real Estate Committee
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Senate Bill 20

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Good afternoon Chairmen Crisco and Megna and Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. I am Mary Moninger-Elia, a West Haven resident and Connecticut Staff of the Alliance for Retired Americans representing more than 53,000 retirees and senior citizens in Connecticut and more than 4 million nationwide.

The Alliance advocates for many issues that impact the quality of life for seniors, and provide services that help them continue to live productive, active lives as they age. I am here today to support SB 20, which would provide support for seniors in need of hearing aids. Additionally, I thank the committee for recognizing that loss of hearing is a big public health problem, and for raising this bill that addresses this need.

Study after study indicates that many seniors have hearing problems, yet a small percentage get tested or treated. Some studies claim that if untreated, the hearing loss progresses more quickly and becomes more debilitating. A study at the University of Wisconsin found more than 90% of adults tested had some degree of hearing loss, yet only 14% of those with hearing loss used hearing aids. Thirty-four (34) % of them had never had their hearing tested.

One might assume that they did not get tested because the diminished hearing didn't interfere with their life. But it could also be because of they knew the cost of hearing aids were prohibitive so why bother. As you know, there is quite an array of hearing aids available and the best performing ones can be quite expensive. A National Council of the Aging survey showed that 55% of seniors cited cost as a reason for not getting hearing aids.

A Duke University study found that for approximately 17% of senior citizens with hearing loss, that loss led to reduction of vocal quality as well. As hearing diminishes, the individual will raise the volume of their voice believing they are not being heard. This may lead to a raspy, garbled speech which further stresses vocal chords, and thus they experience difficulty with two important communication skills.

The National Council of the Aging survey I mentioned also found that untreated hearing loss has "serious emotional and social consequences." Many studies done conclude that the loss of hearing, for obvious reasons,

often leads to isolation and severe depression among the senior population. Not only does loss of hearing rob the individual of their quality of life, their ability to participate with confidence in social situation or with family, but it makes them feel feeble and disconnected. And they are in fact disconnected. They are blocked from the joy of contact with friends and family by the frustration and embarrassment related to their loss of hearing.

When untreated, a minor hearing loss leading to further hearing loss, and ultimately isolation and depression, brings on other problems that will then need to be addressed, and the cost of care for that individual often skyrockets. This cost will be born by the family of the individual and by society. The support offered in this bill, though not as much as the Alliance would have hoped, is at least an attempt to address the problem and will be helpful for some to get the hearing aid assistance before the more severe manifestations take place.

Again, I urge you to pass it out of committee and support it as it makes its way through the committee process and to final passage by the both houses of the General Assembly.