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The NRLN advocates the rights of more than 2 million American retirees from...

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May 6, 2020

The Honorable Greg Walden, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3702

Dear Representative Walden:

On behalf of the more than 2 million retirees and future retirees represented by the National Retiree Legislative Network (NRLN), I am requesting that you urge the Committee on Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee on Health to support **H.R.4056, Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act of 2019**. The bill has been pending in the Subcommittee on Health since July 26, 2019.

Passage of **H.R. 4056** is important because it would significantly enhance benefits for hearing health by providing the 42 million original Medicare beneficiaries with critical direct access to both diagnostic and therapeutic services of audiologists.

Many of the 22 million seniors in Medicare Advantage plans that receive taxpayer subsidies already have hearing benefits and many other special benefits not available in original Medicare. For example, UnitedHealthcare, the largest provider of Medicare Advantage plans, is partnering with Ear Professionals International Corporation (EPIC) to give beneficiaries access to 5,000 audiologists and hearing specialists across the country, as well as hearing aids discounted up to 80 percent. Humana, the second largest provider of Medicare Advantage plans, has teamed up with TruHearing, a hearing health care services and hearing aids company to provide hearing benefits.

Medicare Part B requires a physician's order for patients to see an audiologist and only covers diagnostic services without allowing for follow-up treatment or helping with the cost of a hearing aid. **H.R. 4056** would remove the barriers to hearing health under original Medicare, allowing patients to receive appropriate and cost-effective audiologic services.

Individuals with mild hearing loss are three times more likely to experience a fall, and falls are the leading cause of fatal injury for Americans over 65. Seniors with hearing loss are more likely to develop cognitive problems and experience cognitive decline up to 40 percent faster than those without hearing loss. Untreated hearing loss in seniors can lead to depression, anxiety and social isolation.

The NRLN believes it is unfair and discriminates against original Medicare beneficiaries to not have access to the audiology services that are provided by a number of Medicare Advantage plans.

If you would like to know more about why NRLN supports passage of **H.R. 4056**, please ask a member of your staff to contact me or Alyson Parker, the NRLN's Executive Director in Washington, DC at 813-545-6792 or executivedirector@nrln.org.

Sincerely,



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