



## Testimony of the Colorado Hearing Society

### Supporting HB 20-2018

### Sunset Legislation to Continue Licensing Program for Hearing Aid Providers

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The Colorado Hearing Society, established in 1958, is the professional organization of hearing aid providers in Colorado and is the state chapter of the International Hearing Society, our national body. Colorado hearing aid providers are licensed by the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) Division of Occupations and Profession, Office of Professional Licensing.

Periodically our profession is reviewed by DORA staff under the requirements of Section 24-34-104, C.R.S. to examine whether the licensure program should be continued, repealed or modified. The current review by the DORA Sunset Bill Analyst recommended continuation of the program with certain modification.

Our leadership met with DORA personnel throughout 2019 and strongly supports the bill before the Senate Finance Committee. Several additions were made during the House Health & Insurance Committee which we believed updated and strengthened the bill for added consumer protection and accountability by the profession. These changes were consistent with DORA policies and were found to be acceptable to DORA.

We particularly support the inclusion of a continuing education requirement for Hearing Aid Providers. A previous iteration of the licensure program required Board Certification – that certification includes its own continuing education requirement. However, the program was streamlined and Board Certification was removed, and continuing education needed to be added once again to the licensure program. We believe this requirement is important because hearing aids are mini-computers worn to assist improved hearing. Like other computers, the technology, applications, and testing are constantly evolving. It is important that when prescribing and fitting a hearing aid that the licensed provider remains up to date with these technologies and the capabilities of the device to best serve the patient.

The bill was modified to clarify that an in-person evaluation must occur at the initial testing or fitting because the Deceptive Trade Practices statute (which was added to the bill by DORA recommendation) requires that the Hearing Aid Provider recommend in writing that the patient contact a physician when certain conditions of the ear canal are observed by the Hearing Aid Provider or other medical conditions such as dizziness are reported by the patient.

The bill also eliminates an outdated requirement that a physician provide a written prescription for a hearing aid. This is no longer required nor enforced by the FDA.

Diminished hearing results in loss of family interaction, socialization, and in some cases diminished cognitive functions and increased onset of dementia. We believe that continuation of the licensure program is important to protect consumers in Colorado, especially the vulnerable elderly. Hearing aids are expensive, without question, and oversight of hearing professionals is an important tool to ensure that people who assist consumers in selecting, fitting, and wearing the hearing aid achieve the highest level of hearing improvement possible.

Licensure for hearing aid providers is required in all 50 states. During an earlier period when Colorado failed to continue licensure, consumers suffered. We support HB 20-1218 to strengthen and enhance consumer protection.