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Honorable Donna Shalala
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W. Room 615F
Washington, D.C. 20201

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Dear Secretary Shalala:

10/5/2000

The Food and Drug Administration may shortly propose changes to the way hearing aids are sold that would impede access to hearing care services for millions of our nation's seniors.

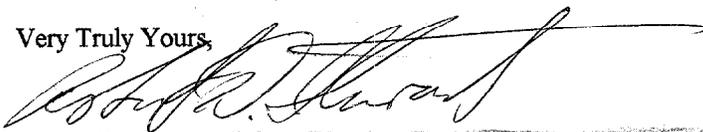
I am retired and was a board certified, state licensed hearing instrument specialist. For forty years until 1990, I provided hearing health care service to hundreds of hearing impaired clientele. Presently, all three members of the hearing health care delivery team (hearing aid specialists, audiologists, and physicians) are recognized as qualified entry points into the hearing health care delivery system. The rule FDA is advocating would allow audiologists -- without any justification -- to install themselves as the sole entry point into hearing health care by allowing states to require tests that only audiologists conduct prior to purchase of a hearing aid.

Allowing audiologists an exclusive role in the hearing aid delivery system, without unqualified medical data evidencing that such role is necessary for public health reasons, would severely undermine public health and safety and would increase costs to the hearing impaired.

Please stop and carefully consider the impact that this proposed rule will have on the nation's hearing impaired and on the nation's small business hearing aid specialists. In particular, please ensure that any proposed rule meets the obligations of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act.

Hearing impairment is a major health care concern. Please don't let the FDA put forth their proposed rule that would impede access to needed hearing health care services for millions of Americans.

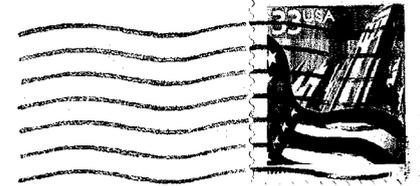
Very Truly Yours,



Robert D. Stewart, Retired
Hearing Instrument Specialist

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THE HONORABLE DONNA SHAHARA
SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
200 INDEPENDENCE AVENUE S.W.
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