



March 5, 2000

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Ms. Jane Henney, MD,
Commissioner Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane,
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Dr. Henney,

I understand that efforts are being made to ban the sale of hearing devices through the mail. This concerns me greatly. I have, for years, been what we laughingly call "hard of hearing", not totally deaf, but in need of amplification in order to hear what most people take for granted: A telephone bell, unless it is in the same room with me; alarms, beeps, sirens and other devices meant to warn of danger; quiet voices, the ones you like to listen to (the strident voice penetrates anything;) telephone conversations. For telephone work, I use a sound amplifying device that attaches between the phone and the receiver. The only difference between this and the small hearing devices I wear in each ear, is size. Are the audiologists going to ban the sale of these amplifiers too? Without one, the telephone would be useless junk for me, and for most, since the telephone receiver (or anything else held close to the ear) creates feedback in the hearing aid.

I am an octogenarian and for many years I have worn hearing aids to enable me to work and to socialize. You have no idea isolating it is to be cursed with defective hearing. I am also a former business woman and can understand where the audiologists and the "Hearing Aid" industry are coming from. To them it must seem that every sale of a mail order hearing aid is a blow to their bottom line. The aids they sell retail in the thousands of dollars each--more, in fact than a desktop computer. As a retiree and living on a very limited income, I can only afford the mail order aids which are priced in the hundreds. And even that is a tight squeeze. To anyone surviving on a limited income, the difference can be between living a normal life and isolation.

I buy the batteries for my mail order aids at the local hearing aid center, a business located nearby. I pay more for the batteries there than I would buying them mail order, but I find it more convenient. The audiologist who owns that particular business remarked to me that the devices I wear in my ears "are not real hearing aids, they are just sound amplifiers." He wanted to know if I bought them through the mail. I told him that inasmuch as I couldn't afford his aids (\$2000 to \$4000 each ear) I was really not dealing with one of his competitors, and whether or not my aids came through the mail or from a local dealer was immaterial until his prices came down to reason. The hearing aid industry is really being very aggressive. A copy of my recent letter will explain.

Dr. Henney, if you can please allow us to handle our own medical problems and ensure us the right to be a part of the human race rather than isolated from it, you will have earned our heartfelt thanks. Please don't let greed win.

Sincerely,


Margalo Schneider
4413 Kittiwake Way
Oceanside, CA 92057

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February 10, 2000

KGTV

Attn: Channel 10 Troubleshooter, Marty Emerald

Dear Marty,

I was particularly distressed to learn that two of our 50 States, California and Florida, will not permit a simple sound amplifying device to be mailed to their residents.

Like many others of my generation (I'm an octogenerian) my hearing is defective. For years now, I have been wearing hearing devices. The devices I am using now, I was informed, are "merely sound amplifying" devices--not "Hearing Aids." Since they enable me to hear as well as the "Hearing Aids" I formerly wore, I really do not care what they are called, but I do care about the difference in price. "Hearing Aids" cost in the thousands of dollars. My "sound amplifying devices" cost in the hundreds. At my age, and in my financial circumstances, the difference is great.

I recently saw a catalog offering the Bio Ear Electronic Sound Amplifying Device for a paltry \$29.99--\$54.95 for two. That read like heaven. I sent my check with my order for two. I was informed that the catalog company could not send the devices to me due to a California law. I would have to have them sent to someone out of State (to be remailed to me?) I wrote asking for particulars while trying to decide on the very few people I know living outside of California. The response was to refund my money.

To me, this law seems bizarre. The only people who are damaged by the sale of these devices are the manufacturers of the highly overpriced "Hearing Aid" which is priced much higher than a PC desktop. To deprive people of hearing in order to enhance the bottom line, is too much.

Unless you have experienced the silence that hearing defects produce, have been unable to hear alarm sounds, telephone bells, horns, speech or music, you cannot know what it means to be deaf. A device that amplifies sounds, worn in the ear, means a much safer, more social, happier and more productive life, an end to isolation. For years, I have used a sound amplifier on my telephone that connects between the phone and the receiver; works like a charm, just like the devices in my ears. Will they ban that too?

I find it interesting to note that the two States that have enacted these laws are those with the largest populations of senior citizens: California and Florida. I do not believe that this is accidental, do you? I do not know how the law reads. It must have been enacted very quietly as this is the first I have heard of it. I do not know how they justify it. I do know that it is an abomination. Please see what you can do.

Sincerely,

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