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New York Legislators Seek to Enhance Hearing Aid Access for Patients

*Many physicians' offices unable to provide hearing aid services in New York,
despite being recognized as provider of choice*

Alexandria, VA – New York could take an important step this year in improving access to hearing aids for a growing number of hearing-impaired. Today, Assemblymen Jeff Dinowitz of the Bronx and Micah Kellner of New York, introduced a bill that, should the New York Legislature adopt it, would open up an additional point of access to hearing aid services – physicians' offices.

“Physicians' offices are a key access point for patients entering the hearing health system. With only one in four people adopting hearing aids who could benefit from them and the number of hearing-impaired on the rise, we need to provide those in need of hearing aids every opportunity to get them,” said Assemblyman Dinowitz. “Patients are not being well-served by the existing law, which is anti-business and anti-consumer.”

A current state law – the only of its kind in the country – prohibits physicians who medically evaluate hearing loss from deriving a profit from hearing aid sales. As a result, few, if any, physicians' offices offer hearing aid services to their patients since doing so is economically unworkable, despite their being an appropriate and convenient setting for consumers.

Assemblymen Dinowitz and Kellner outlined multiple benefits of a change to the law, including enhancing patients' access to treatment services and increasing competition among providers, potentially driving down the cost for hearing aids for patients. Additionally, patients would be able to have continuity of care provided by their physicians, which is particularly advantageous when patients have complex medical conditions. A 2009 Consumer Reports article indicated that the best provider of hearing aids is a medical office headed by an otolaryngologist (ENT physician) with an audiologist on staff - an unlikely option in New York unless the law is changed.

Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz represents the 81st Assembly District, comprised of the Bronx. He Chairs the Assembly Aging Committee, and serves on the Assembly Health, Judiciary, and Election Law Committees.

Assemblyman Micah Kellner represents the 65th Assembly District, located in New York City. He is a member of the Assembly Consumer Affairs and Protection, Environmental Conservation, Banks, and Cities Committees.

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About the AAO-HNS

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (www.entnet.org), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents nearly 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The organization's vision: "Empowering otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care."