

February 8, 2017

House Committee on Health and Human Services
Statehouse, Room 546-S
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Chairman Hawkins and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Lucy Crabtree and I am from Lawrence. I am hard of hearing and I am writing in favor of HB 2195, which would transfer the powers, duties, and functions of the board of examiners in fitting and dispensing of hearing instruments to the secretary of aging and disability services (KDADS).

The Kansas Board of Hearing Aid Examiners, as it is commonly known, certifies and licenses professionals who dispense and fit hearing aids, including audiologists and hearing instrument specialists. The board currently operates as an independent regulatory board; however, it does not have an official website, and contact information is difficult to find.

My hearing health depends largely on the quality of my hearing health care. But if the entity that ensures the quality of my hearing health care is operating without much accountability or transparency, that makes me a little nervous! Who do I talk to if I need to report a hearing health professional for not meeting the standards of the profession? How do I find a certified and licensed hearing instrument specialist? Who is on the board? How can I be confident that the board's decisions are in the best interests of the deaf, late-deafened, and hard of hearing population, a group that includes children, seniors, and veterans?

Audiologists typically hold two licenses: one from the state through KDADS, and one from the board of examiners. Another set of professionals, hearing instrument specialists, only need a license from the board of examiners. Hearing instrument specialists play an important role in the hearing loss community. People with mild hearing loss may find hearing instrument specialists' services sufficient for their needs. There are fewer audiologists in more sparsely populated areas, such as western Kansas, and hearing instrument specialists can provide services to people who may not otherwise have easy access to a hearing health care professional.

However, hearing instrument specialists only need a license from the Board of Examiners, and this board is not easy to keep accountable in its current state. This makes me particularly concerned for my neighbors who utilize the services of a hearing instrument specialist over an audiologist. Isolation, depression, and dementia are possible side effects of hearing loss, especially for those who are late-deafened. In order to help protect consumers' hearing health, all hearing health professionals, including hearing instrument specialists, must be held to the highest standards of care.

I support moving the board to KDADS' oversight in order to:

- Create public transparency — KDADS has an easily searchable website, and contact information is clearly displayed.
- Establish oversight — The board would become an advisory board to the Secretary of KDADS, and subject to KDADS regulations, which are publicly available.
- Restore consumer confidence — Consumers can rest easy knowing the professionals who care for their hearing health have been vetted, certified, and licensed according to the strictest standards of the profession.

Finally, because KDADS already oversees the licensure and registration for Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists, it only makes sense to add the Board of Examiners to an existing group of related service providers.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my remarks, and for your service to your deaf, hard of hearing, and late-deafened constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lucy Crabtree". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Lucy Crabtree
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