

OPTIONAL FORM 99 (7-90)

## FAX TRANSMITTAL

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|----------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| To                   | Jennifer Klein | From                                     | Sharma            |
| Dept./Agency         | Hearing        | Phone #                                  | Letter See        |
| Fax #                | Bottom 2nd     | Fax #                                    | page for addition |
| NSN 7540-01-317-7368 |                | 5099-101 GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION |                   |

Mr. Jonathan W. Leigh, President  
Long Island Health and Speech Society, Inc.  
430 Lakeville Road  
New Hyde Park, NY 11040

Dear Mr. Leigh:

Thank you for your letter of April 28 regarding coverage of hearing aids and services for people with hearing impairments. Please accept my apologies for the tardiness of this letter.

First, it is important to note that the President's Health Security Act does not "leave out people with hearing impairments completely." In fact, the HSA guarantees that all people, including those with "pre-existing conditions" such as hearing impairments, will be able to obtain health insurance without facing discrimination and denial of coverage or exorbitant premiums. Employers will no longer be reticent to hire workers with disabilities, out of fear of huge increases in insurance rates. People with hearing impairments will no longer be locked into jobs in order to keep themselves covered. Community rating means consumers pay based on average costs in their community -- people with disabilities will not be asked to pay any more than their neighbors and coworkers without disabilities.

You ask why the comprehensive benefit package outlined in Title I of the HSA does not cover hearing aids. The benefit package in the President's bill was based on a typical benefit package offered by large employers today. Most of these policies do not pay for hearing aids.

Although hearing aids are not included in the comprehensive benefit package, they may be covered under other Health Security Act provisions, including:

- Medicaid. Most Medicaid acute care benefits will be replaced by the comprehensive benefit package offered to all Americans, without regard to disability or income. However, items and services currently covered under Medicaid that will not be covered under the HSA benefit package, will be continued for certain Medicaid recipients.
- Services for Low Income Children. A new federal program for poor children would supplement coverage under the benefit

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package. This program will help provide some of the Medicaid services not included in the comprehensive benefit package, such as hearing aids.

- Long-Term Care. The Health Security Act includes a major new community based long-term support program for people with disabilities, without regard to age or income. This program may cover a range of personal assistance and other services such as assistive technology -- including hearing aids -- and respite care that may benefit people with disabilities and their families.

It is also important to note that the HSA does not eliminate other programs that may currently be paying for the cost and maintenance of hearing aids. For instance, the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant and its component for children with special health care needs, including those with hearing impairments, will continue. States will be able to use these funds to complement services available through the guaranteed benefit package.

In addition, children with disabilities will continue to have the guarantee of free appropriate public education, including related services, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as well as the early intervention services of Part H. To the extent hearing aids are covered under IDEA, they may continue to be provided.

Regarding the invitation for Secretary Shalala to speak on June 28, I understand that the Secretary's scheduling office has advised the Alexander Graham Bell Association that she regrets she is unable to attend. I do not know if a designate has been sought.

I hope this information is helpful. The Department will continue to work with Congress to assure that all Americans, including those with hearing impairments, receive the best possible treatment under health care reform.

Sincerely,

Kevin Thurm

#### Possible additional language

"Furthermore, I am sure you would be interested in knowing that as we have worked with the committees in Congress marking up the health reform bill some committees have introduced amendments to include hearing aids for children. We are happy with their progress and we are looking forward to working with them in the future."