

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington DC 20554

In the Matter of)	
)	
Revisions to Reporting Requirements)	WT Docket No. 17-228
Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile)	
Handsets)	

**COMMENTS OF THE
HEARING INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION**

The Hearing Industries Association (“HIA”) hereby comments on the Commission’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (“NPRM”) issued in the above-captioned proceeding.¹ Hearing aid compatibility (“HAC”) reporting requirements provide valuable information for people with hearing loss who use hearing aids. The Federal Communications Commission (“FCC” or “Commission”) should continue to oversee its HAC regime, to include maintaining HAC reporting requirements by non-nationwide, wireless service providers (“Non-Tier I Service Providers”), for so long as the HAC requirements are in effect.

BACKGROUND

HIA is the trade association of hearing aid manufacturers and represents manufacturers of some 85% of the hearing aids sold in the United States. HIA members make every effort to design their devices to meet all the needs of people with hearing loss, including ensuring compatibility with wireless handsets and as many other consumer electronics products as possible. HIA seeks to advance the goal of ensuring that people with hearing loss who wear hearing aids are able to participate to the maximum extent possible in all activities – both at work

¹ *Revisions to Reporting Requirements Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WT Docket No. 17-228 (rel. Sept. 27, 2017) (“NPRM”).

and at play – that persons with full hearing can enjoy, including the ability to use smartphones and other wireless handsets.

Hearing aids are vital to numerous Americans as a means of staying connected and involved. While there are new hearing aids on the market that incorporate low power wireless technologies such as Bluetooth Low Energy, most hearing aids still employ either acoustic coupling or a telecoil (a small copper coil located inside the hearing aid that transforms the hearing aid into a wireless receiver). The FCC’s HAC regime provides a huge benefit to people with hearing loss who use hearing aids because it ensures the opportunity to select from a wide-range of wireless handsets without concern about interference to their hearing aids.

DISCUSSION

The Commission seeks comment on whether to exempt a service provider that is not a Tier I carrier (*i.e.*, Non-Tier I Service Providers) from the FCC Form 655 HAC reporting requirements, or alternatively to modify those requirements while maintaining the reporting requirements for Tier I carriers and handset manufacturers.² In particular, the Commission asks whether the HAC reporting requirements for Non-Tier I Service Providers are still necessary to achieve the Commission’s objectives and whether the burden of complying with these reporting requirements outweighs the associated benefits.³

Although people with hearing loss who use hearing aids continue to face difficulty finding HAC-compliant devices that are interoperable with their hearing aids, the HAC reports have proven to be one of the only useful sources of information for Americans in search of wireless providers that provide HAC-compliant wireless handsets. Eliminating these HAC reporting requirements, even just for Non-Tier I Service Providers, will only make it more

² NPRM at ¶ 8.

³ NPRM at ¶ 9.

difficult for people with hearing loss who use hearing aids to find compatible wireless handsets. Therefore, HIA continues to support the HAC reporting requirements for all service providers, at least until new wireless technologies are well developed and available at all price points so to allow the elimination of the HAC rules. As HIA has previously explained, the Association expects this to occur within a decade.⁴

HIA also supports the HAC reporting requirements because they include essential information that helps to effectively monitor compliance with the HAC rules. The HAC reporting requirements currently serve as the most effective method for the FCC to monitor compliance with the HAC offerings rules because provider websites are not always reliable or trackable.⁵ Additionally, the HAC reporting requirements help the FCC monitor the availability of wireless handsets that are compatible with current handsets, and independently track progress towards the goal of 100% HAC handset offerings.⁶

As HIA has detailed in other proceedings,⁷ new low power wireless technologies are rapidly being developed by the hearing aid industry and someday soon may end the need for HAC rules.⁸ HIA's position is that, likely within less than a decade, this technology will be well developed, proven, and available to consumers at all price points. When that happens, the present

⁴ See Comments of The Hearing Industries Association in WT Docket Nos. 15-285 and 07-250 (filed Jan. 28, 2016) ("HIA 2016 Comments").

⁵ See Letter from Lise Hamlin, Director of Public Policy, Hearing Loss Association of America, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, Docket No. 17-228 (filed Nov. 1, 2017) (expressing view that there are few other useful means for consumers to obtain information on HAC offerings other than the FCC filing requirements).

⁶ The Commission just last year adopted an industry/consumer groups proposal to work towards an 100% HAC deployment. *Improvements to Benchmarks and Related Requirements Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets*, Report and Order, WT Docket No. 15-285, 31 FCC Rcd 9336 (2016).

⁷ See HIA 2016 Comments.

⁸ See *id.*

HAC rules likely will not be necessary, and all providers may be relieved of their reporting requirements. But until that time, the benefits of the HAC reporting requirements presently outweigh the need to exempt any providers.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, HIA does not support the Commission's proposed revisions to the HAC reporting requirements to exempt Non-Tier I Service Providers.

Respectfully submitted,



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November 13, 2017