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January 26, 2006

James F. Battey, M.D., Ph.D.
Director, NIDCD
National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders
National Institutes of Health
31 Center Drive, MSC 2320
Bethesda, MD USA 20892-2320

Dear Dr. Battey:

Recently specialists at Children's Hospital in Boston, the House Ear Institute in Los Angeles, and the American Academy of Audiology have raised concerns that iPods and other portable music players may contribute to premature hearing loss.[1] In light of these concerns, I am writing to request a review of the available scientific information regarding the impact of portable music players on hearing loss and recommendations to help consumers mitigate any potential damage to their hearing from these devices.

Media reports suggest that personal portable music players allow consumers to play music at levels that can damage hearing and because new devices hold more music and have longer lasting batteries, they pose an increased threat to consumer health. However, according to the Wall Street Journal, the issue hasn't been well studied, and no one knows for certain how much hearing loss might be attributable to music players.[2]

Portable music players have become very popular because they provide customized entertainment in very high-quality formats. But as sales soar into the tens of millions, consumers need to have good information about the potential health concerns posed by these devices. People don't want to give up their portable music devices. However, they need to know whether they are at risk for premature hearing loss and how to protect themselves. Loud noise above 85 decibels (dB) can cause permanent hearing loss depending on the duration of exposure. Portable music players are capable of producing sound levels ranging anywhere from 85 to 120 decibels. Exposure to 85 decibels begins with the volume turned only about one-quarter of the way up.

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[1] Spencer Jane. "Behind the Music: IPods and Hearing Loss." *The Wall Street Journal*. 10 January, 2006. 23 January 2006. <http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB113685799723842312.html?mod=todays_free_feature#CX>.
[2] Spencer

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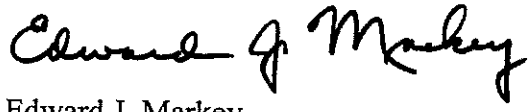
I respectfully request that the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders conduct a review of all available research regarding personal music devices and hearing loss. The report should also include responses to the following questions:

1. Do portable music players contribute to premature hearing loss? If so, to what extent?
2. Short of giving up their personal music devices, what can consumers do to protect their hearing?
3. What research is currently available with regard to safe volume limits and exposure time for recreational listening?
4. According to the Washington Post, Apple has declined to provide information on the maximum output level for its iPod devices.[3] What information is readily available to consumers regarding the maximum output level for various portable music devices?
5. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), "Loud noise above 85 decibels can cause permanent hearing loss."[4] How can consumers determine whether they are listening to music at levels that put them at risk for hearing loss?
6. Do earbuds increase the risk of hearing loss more than traditional earmuff style headphones?
7. Are sound-minimizing headsets (either "noise-canceling" or "sound-isolating" headphones) better for your hearing than traditional headphones or earbuds?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If you have any questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Katharine Reinhalter or Mr. Jeffrey Duncan on my staff at 202-225-2836. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress

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[3] Mott, Gregory. "The iPod and the Fury: A Reality Check of the Recent Reports on Mobile Music and Hearing Loss." *Washington Post*. 17 January 2006. 23 January 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/16/AR2006011601100.html.>

[4] "Unsafe Usage of Portable Music Players May Damage Your Hearing."American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. 20 December 2005, 23 January 2006. <http://www.asha.org/about/news/releases/mp3players.htm.>