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DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING ADVOCACY GROUPS AND THEATER OWNERS ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCE AGREEMENT TO MAKE JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS TO DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE ON ADA RULE FOR MOVIE THEATERS
Commitments To Voluntary Actions To Improve Access Also Outlined

(Washington, D.C. - 21 November 2014) The Alexander Graham Bell Association (AG Bell), the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA), the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) today announced an agreement to file joint recommendations with the Department of Justice regarding its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on captioning equipment in U.S. movie theaters.

After several weeks of discussions, the five organizations agreed on a set of recommendations (attached) to the DOJ to improve access to movies for deaf and hard of hearing patrons.

- Closed captioning (CC) and audio description (AD) technologies are to be installed in all digital movie theater auditoriums nationwide.
- The joint plan establishes certain minimum closed captioning device requirements with a monitoring requirement. This flexible, market-responsive device scoping method will ensure access for all deaf and hard of hearing patrons and respond to actual consumer demand.
- The compliance period has been restructured to reflect reasonable timelines in delivery and installation of CC and AD systems.

In addition to these and other requirements regarding marketing, staff training, and equipment maintenance, the movie theater industry and the advocacy groups have committed to voluntary actions (attached) to expand access to the movies. These include:

- Encouraging movie distributors to provide CC and AD data files on all movies and trailers.
- Encouraging movie distributors to provide theaters with information on the availability of CC and AD technologies in advance of the film's release so this information can be included in show time listings.

- Sharing information on areas with large deaf and hard of hearing populations, including schools, and conducting specific outreach to community groups.

“A.G. Bell and other deaf advocates have been fighting for captioning access in movie theaters ever since 1927 when the first “talkie” movies were released,” said John F. Stanton, chair, Public Affairs Council of A.G. Bell. “These joint comments are the result of decades of efforts from A.G. Bell’s members and other deaf advocates to attain captioning access in movie theaters. Today is truly a landmark day in captioning access history. As soon as these joint comments are effectuated, the days for deaf or hard of hearing consumers having to wait for a movie to come out on television, video, or DVD for the captions will be over.”

"This is the end of a long road, and like a lot of long roads, there have been a few bumps along the way," said John Waldo, ALDA member and attorney. "Most ALDA members lost some or all of their hearing later in life, and movies were one of those things we could and did enjoy at one time but can no longer do so. We are very grateful to the theater owners for helping us get to this destination, and we look forward to a continuing and productive partnership."

“Hearing Loss Association of America welcomes this historic agreement with NATO,” said Anna Gilmore Hall, executive director of HLAA. “With this agreement comes the potential for anyone with hearing loss to see and understand any movie any time using captioning devices. For us, that is a “Welcome Back” banner for people who had given up going to the movies simply because they could no longer hear.”

"These Joint Recommendations from a breakthrough coalition of movie theater owners and deaf and hard of hearing advocacy groups are a tremendous step forward in ensuring equal access for everyone," said Howard A. Rosenblum, Esq., CEO of the NAD. "Since 1880, the NAD has advocated for equal access to all aspects of life and is thrilled to be involved in this collaborative effort to break down barriers on an ongoing basis."

John Fithian, NATO president and CEO, said “This partnership between deaf and hard of hearing advocates and the movie theater industry has been remarkably productive and promises to yield results that will benefit our patrons and expand access to movie theaters in a real, practical and measurable way.”

"Encouraged by the DOJ and particularly Deputy Assistant Attorney General Eve Hill, NATO and the advocacy groups have worked diligently to develop a Joint Position that will be flexible, encourage new technology, and enable movie goers across the nation to benefit from closed captioning in all digital theatres. We will be submitting our recommendations to the DOJ for consideration as part of the rule," said Randy Smith, chief administrative officer for Regal Entertainment Group.

About

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell) is a non-profit organization that represents a community of 13,000 nationwide. Through advocacy, education, research and financial aid, AG Bell helps to ensure that

every child and adult with hearing loss has the opportunity to listen, talk and thrive in mainstream society.

The Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA) is an international organization with members throughout the United States from various economic, racial, religious, age, and occupational groups. The organization strives to provide education, role models and support for late-deafened adults. It also advocates on behalf of late-deafened adults in promoting public and private programs that support their needs, and encourages research into the various aspects of late-deafness. In furtherance of its advocacy mission, ALDA has actively worked on movie captioning.

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is the nation's leading consumer organization representing some 48 million Americans with hearing loss. HLAA provides assistance and resources for people with hearing loss and their families.

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) is a non-profit organization dedicated to a mission of preserving, protecting and promoting the civil, human, and linguistic rights of 48 million deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States. Established in 1880, NAD advocates in all areas including but not limited to early intervention, education, employment, technology, healthcare, telecommunications and more.

The National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) is a non-profit organization whose members own and operate more than 32,000 of the 40,000 movie screens in the U.S. NATO members operate theaters in all 50 states.

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