

HLAA and Theater Association Reach an Accord

In an historic first, Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) along with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA), the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell) sat down with representatives from the National Association of Theater Owners (NATO) to hammer out an agreement on movie captioning. HLAA announced that the meetings resulted in two documents which have been filed with the US Department of Justice in its rulemaking on movie access: the Joint Recommendations to the US Department of Justice and the Joint Voluntary Commitments on Closed Captioning and Video Description.

After several weeks of discussions, the five organizations agreed on a set of recommendations 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.

- Encouraging theater operators to accommodate large group requests for either open captioned shows or large group requests for closed closed captioning devices, as long as they have advance notice to accommodate a group.
- Promoting the availability of closed captioning systems among the members of HLAA and other consumer groups.