

January 20, 2020

Rep. Ann Pugh
Chair, House Human Services Committee
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Representative Pugh:

I live in Royalton and am hard of hearing. The theater I use (sparingly) is The Playhouse in Randolph. It recently became a co-op which I joined. They wrote grants and were able to purchase something similar to Google glasses. It's bulky, putting it on as glasses and you have to set it so that you aim the captions at the black space under the movie as it's being shown. It's an improvement over just the headphones, but I could never understand how I can get captions on Netflix films at home, on all my TV watching at home and yet can't get easy to use/see captions at the theater.

I have to give credit to the Playhouse. I was very vocal re this need. The board took it up. I would, in a perfect world, like to see captions shown at the movies all the time, on every movie. However, I do understand that some people find captions distracting. Is it fair to ask, do they find ramps outside buildings distracting? I sincerely think this issue of distraction is more of a nonissue. I personally have drastically cut down my movie attendance because of this. It's just awkward to use the Google glasses.

My son is an animator. He makes his living in the movie industry. As the country's population ages and more and more people suffer hearing loss, his career is threatened to a certain extent. Because he's in the movie industry I like to talk to him about current movies. Now that I don't go as often, I have to wait until they come out in Netflix (can only use one streaming device due to cost). I find this very frustrating and limiting.

As a kid, we went to the movies, literally, every Saturday. Of course, it was only 25 cents then! However, I would probably go to the movies now at least 2x/week if the captions were more easily accessible. Many of my friends have stopped going because of this caption issue. They can't understand the dialogue. I am totally dependent on captions on the TV. I can access captions on most movies available thru Netflix or on DVD's I have at home. This is not true of some old movies, but that's life.

60,000 Vermonters have hearing loss and are at risk of social isolation. Let me reinforce this: hearing loss increases

social isolation exponentially -- including who may not want to talk to you on the phone, the embarrassment of asking "what?", meetings where you're in a large room and/or several people talk at once. Seniors are victims of social isolation as well as hearing loss-induced isolation. I live alone and have an active life. I have to force myself into activities to avoid being isolated. The hearing loss just makes that more severe.

Given the fact that turning on open captions is as simple as adding subtitles to home-streamed movies, I think it should be done all the time for every movie. H.312 requires open caption screenings to be clearly defined on background information and marketing info.

Please see that this passes.

Thank you.

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