

Laura Siegel's written testimony for Vermont Bill 871:

Hello Senator Brian Campion and Senator Martine Larocque Gulick and other members of the committee, Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about accessibility features for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind.

When constructing or upgrading school facilities ensuring accessibility for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind (DHHDB) are just as important as accommodations for those with mobility issues. Here are some examples whereas school construction could incorporate.

- 1) Visual Alert Systems: Provide both audio and visual signals to notify individuals about fire alarms, doorbells, and emergency announcements. These systems typically consist of flashing lights (can be color coded) or vibrating devices placed in areas where they can be easily seen.
- 2) Signage: Turn the lighting features on and off for restrooms usages, exits and even emergency evacuation routes. For instance, when it comes to the restrooms, we should be able to access the stalls with dignity and not have to touch the floor to see if there is anything behind the stalls or peek through the cracks.
- 3) Accessible Communication Devices: A public videophone, captioned phone or TTY should be easily accessible at all times on campus. A person with hearing loss relies on such technology to make and receive calls but is unable to do so if they are not permitted to use cell phones or other telecommunication devices during school hours. For instance, a student with a hearing loss should be able to make their own phone calls to their parents without relying on another.
- 4) Induction Loop Systems: Install induction loop systems in key areas such as auditoriums, meeting rooms, reception desks and even classrooms to transmit audio signals directly to hearing aids or cochlear implants equipped with telecoil technology. This allows individuals who are DHH to hear amplified sound without background noise or interference.
- 5) Accessible Telecommunication Infrastructure: Ensure that the building is equipped with telecommunications infrastructure, including compatible phone systems, captioned phones, and text messaging services. This enables individuals who are DHHDB to communicate effectively with building occupants, emergency services, and external contacts.
- 6) Accessible restrooms: Design restrooms that are accessible and inclusive. Install visual alarms and indicators to alert users of occupancy status, provide clear signage with universal symbols, and incorporate adequate space and accommodations.
- 7) Elevators/Front door: include video cam for visual communication. Intercoms are intended only for those who can hear/understand the person speaking on the other end or the buzzing noise.

We shouldn't be dependent on others for our communication access or safety. In moments of adrenaline rush, individuals often focus solely on their own concerns, disregarding those of others. I've personally experienced being overlooked or dismissed in both student and teacher roles in various school scenarios. As a teacher, I was often patronized and reprimanded for not responding as quickly as hearing individuals. There was insistence that I always be accompanied by a hearing staff member, but it never happened. I sincerely doubt it ever will. With those accommodations in place, there won't be a need because we deserve to be able to maintain our independence in all settings (home, work, and even school).