

STATEMENT OF BARRY KASINITZ ON HB 264

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Barry Kasinitz, and I am one of the hundreds of thousands of Marylanders who lives with a hearing loss. I wish to express my enthusiastic support for HB 264, and ask the Members of this Committee to take another important step toward providing people with hearing loss full access to our society.

This legislation would require Maryland movie theaters to include open captioning in at least two showings of every movie each week, and ensure that closed captioning technology is available and working for all showings. While assistive listening devices help, movies provide special challenges for people with hearing loss that can only be overcome with captioning.

For a century, movies have been an integral part of American society, to which people with hearing loss have long been denied access. Significantly, movies are generally social events, enjoyed by friends and loved ones together, rather than attended alone. When a group of friends decides to see a movie, it can place a person with hearing loss in an untenable position: Attend the movie, and endure two hours of frustration at not being able to follow the dialogue, or miss out on social connections. Studies have shown that people with hearing loss suffer social isolation, and the inability to attend events such as movies is part of the reason.

I long ago gave up on seeing first run movies because I am unable to comprehend them. While I sometimes see those movies months or years later when captioned versions are available to TV or DVD, the experience is vastly different than getting to see a movie everyone is talking about. Being able to see captioned movies in a movie theater would make a meaningful difference to me and so many others.

The significance of captioned movies was highlighted just last month by Academy Award winning actress Marlee Matlin who led a walk out of the prestigious Sundance Film Festival when the Festival failed to provide adequate captioning. Quite simply, failure to provide captioning serves as a large sign of the door of a movie theater saying: "People with hearing loss not allowed."

Thank for your consideration. I hope this committee to act expeditiously on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Barry Kasinitz
1109 Maple Avenue
Rockville, MD 20851