



Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

The Montgomery County Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is pleased to offer our strong support for HB 426 and SB 92 to require open captioning in movie theaters. This legislation is another important step toward providing the hundreds of thousands of Marylanders with hearing loss full access to our society.

This compromise 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.

The significance of captioned movies was highlighted recently 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 a large sign of the door of a movie theater saying: "People with hearing loss are not welcome."

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

Sincerely,

Montgomery County, Maryland Chapter
Hearing Loss Association of America