

November 3, 2006

The National Capital Region Branch of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA-NCR) is a non-profit organization led by hard of hearing and deafened individuals with varying degrees of hearing loss. CHHA-NCR advocates the rights and needs of hard of hearing and deafened persons in an effort to break down social barriers, create awareness and fully integrate hard of hearing and deafened persons into our city.

We thank the Committee for allowing us this opportunity to comment on the services offered by the National Capital Commission. CHHA-NCR recommends that the NCC:

1. Develops in-house programs to raise their employee's sensitivity and skill levels in order to provide more appropriate services to hard of hearing and deafened persons.
2. Maintain open communication with persons with hearing loss and their organizations to exchange accurate and reliable information for strengthening services and meet consumer needs.
3. Design and update their website, information kiosks and video consoles that meet the needs of the hard of hearing and deafened persons.
4. Involve organizations and persons with hearing loss with the skills and experience to conduct access surveys of premises and services and to serve as resource persons and advisors for improving programs.

The above recommendations are based on an audit of the NCC's Capital Infocentre on Wellington Street, in Ottawa. The NCC has other public facilities and services but CHHA-NCR decided to audit this one facility because it is the main NCC location that offers information to the public.

Our audit was conducted on October 6, 2006 by M. David, President of the association. The findings of the audit follow:

### **Basement**

- 1) The basement has 3 public telephones. None of these telephones provide text-based service (TTY). At least one of the telephones should be a TTY Public Payphone. *Hard of hearing and deafened visitors face unequal access to services.*

### **1<sup>st</sup> Floor**

- 1) The Info Kiosks on the ground floor have computer consoles that allow visitors to interact with the program and find information about Ottawa and NCC attractions. The program is generally accessible to hard of hearing persons however; the video streams in some portions of the program provide an audio soundtrack that is not captioned. *Hard of hearing and deafened visitors face unequal access to information.*

- 2) The same Info Kiosks also provide referral information that is incomplete insofar as not listing telephone numbers for services that have text-based (TTY) numbers, ex. the Canadian War Museum and the Museum of Civilization. *Hard of hearing and deafened visitors face unequal access to information.*
- 3) The ground floor also provides a telephone for visitors to call accommodation, and related tourist services. The telephone service is accessible only to persons who can hear. Persons with profound hearing loss require a text-based telephone (TTY). *Hard of hearing and deafened visitors face unequal access to services.*

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**

- 1) The theatre that shows the short promotional film “*Footloose in the Capital*” is not accessible to hard of hearing and deafened persons. The acoustics of the room are inferior; Assistive Listening Devices are not provided; the film itself contains a soundtrack that is not captioned. *Hard of hearing and deafened visitors face unequal access to information.*
- 2) Interactive video kiosks are also provided on this floor that allows patrons to choose which language they prefer to listen to the audio portion of the presentation. The videos are not captioned and thus not accessible to deafened persons or those with profound hearing loss. *Hard of hearing and deafened visitors face unequal access to information.*

Based on the audit of the Capital Infocentre, our association can only assume that the remainder of the NCC’s public facilities pose similar challenges to persons with hearing loss. This is a regrettable situation and clearly against established statutes and federal regulations under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada that require federal departments and agencies to carry out their responsibilities to communicate effectively with ALL Canadians with disabilities, *not just persons in wheelchairs.*

We thank the committee for considering these recommendations and look forward to hearing from the National Capital Commission about implementing these changes and making Ottawa the most accessible Capital in the world.

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