

Rep. Jamie Becker-Finn, Chairman
Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee

Testimony in support of HF 1134: Closed Captioning on public televisions

Greetings Rep. Becker-Finn,

My name is Barbara Schneider; I am (acting) Vice President of the Hearing Loss Association of America, Twin Cities Chapter and 18 year resident of our great state of Minnesota.

I have had hearing loss for more than 10 years and wear 2 hearing aids. I depend upon closed captioning (CC) at home and in public places.

Public areas are necessarily noisy, which interferes with my ability to understand what is said on television. It becomes a constant audible garble. This is especially problematic when travelling through airports or in restaurants with TVs. I can hear them talking, but cannot make sense of it. This creates an unnecessary stress which becomes exhausting. Without closed captioning this results in a feeling of isolation when I can't participate in shared knowledge of what is said on the broadcast, and everyone else can. This starts a cascade of negative thoughts and feelings as the natural flow of conversation turns to information just heard on the TV which I could not understand. Asking others to repeat what was said is annoying to them, and the conversation tends to die with my hearing loss as the cause. My social life has suffered because of this at an age when such sociality is crucial to my well-being. Closed captioning in public would help alleviate this downward spiral and allow me to keep up, and maintain independence in later life.

Without closed captioning, I also miss needed local info. whether practical, such as weather and traffic reports, or opportunities for exploring locales and events. This is especially true in airports and large travel centers when travelling throughout the state. We need knowledge in order to enjoy full participation in the world, and if there is no closed captioning, we are left adrift, often confused, or dependent on others, sometimes strangers, to inform us. This is not always reliable, and certainly annoying to the those asked. My own family who love me dearly feels impatient when I have to ask them to repeat something said. It just stops the natural flow conversation I am trying to be part of. The level of distress is high.

Some people object to closed captioning as visual clutter on the screen. They don't understand how crucial it is for us. A few public service spots on TV would go a long way to educate the public about this vital service to the 20% of Minnesotans who have hearing loss. Many who object will need closed captioning in the future.

My experience with hearing loss, and that of many others with whom I have spoken, is that we feel invisible in the hearing world; not having closed captioning makes this worse. Human beings make connection through communication. Without connection, we wither. We are here, we are not going away, and we deserve to understand TV broadcasts just like hearing folks. Hearing loss is not a moral issue, it is a human/life issue.

Please pass HF1134 to require closed captioning in public places.

Thank you,

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