

March 28, 2008

The Hon. George Smitherman  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
MPP, Toronto Centre-Rosedale  
10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Hepburn Block  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Mr. Smitherman,

On behalf of the Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing constituents of Durham Region, we would like the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to recognize the need of Deaf and Hard of Hearing homeowners to have access to financial assistance to cover the costs of accessible smoke detectors through the Assistive Devices Program (ADP).

The Ontario government has established a new law requiring all homeowners to have smoke detectors set up on each floor in their homes. This has a detrimental impact on Deaf and Hard of Hearing homeowners who are unable to afford the steep cost of accessible smoke detectors that is visual, not audible. In light of increased fire-related deaths in the province, it is important to understand that Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents of Ontario are at higher risk due to the costs of accessible smoke detectors. There had been documented fire-related deaths of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals in both Manitoba and Nova Scotia.

There are funding available for recipients of benefits from the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works to provide accessible smoke detectors in their homes. There is no funding available for working Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals who must comply with the new law. This may cost them up to \$1,000 to comply with this new legislation, while for the average homeowner, may cost them only \$60 to \$75. The average cost to purchase an accessible smoke detector is approximately \$160, plus the additional cost of hard-wiring the device by an electrician.

It is our understanding that The Canadian Hearing Society, at the provincial level, have been advocating for the Ministry of Health to accommodate this in light of the new legislation and the safety of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. To date, their success has been limited.

We urge that the Ministry of Health revisit the issue of adding accessible smoke detectors to the ADP list of approved devices to provide financial assistance for. Under the existing program, the Deaf homeowner will still be responsible to pay for 20% of the costs.

Based on the 2006 census in Ontario, as per the Statistics Canada website ([www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca)), we have 121,602 Ontarians who are considered culturally deaf, oral

deaf and cochlear implant users. We also have an additional 486,411 Ontarians who are considered hard of hearing. Without wearing hearing aids and sleeping at night, they would be unable to hear the regular, audible smoke detector. This is a large number of Ontarians with safety in their homes at risk.

We hope that you will take this matter under serious consideration and provide financial assistance to those who need it with the potential of saving lives in Ontario.

Respectfully,

Veronica Bickle  
Chair, Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee

cc: *Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee* - Gordon Ryall, David Hamen, Beverley Dooley, Don Kinsley, Kim Reid, Jayne Hughes, Mirek Swiecicki and Mike Finnegan

cc: *Maggie Doherty-Gilbert* – Regional Director, The Canadian Hearing Society, Peterborough and Durham Regions

cc: *Gary Malkowski* – Special Advisor to the CEO, The Canadian Hearing Society

cc: *Jo-Ann Bentley* – Provincial Co-ordinator, Communication Devices Program, The Canadian Hearing Society

cc: *Paul Smith* – Executive Director, Ontario Association of the Deaf