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January 26, 2009

The Honourable Rick Bartolucci
Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
18th Floor
25 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Y6

Dear Mr. Bartolucci,

On behalf of the Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing constituents and homeowners of Durham Region, we would like the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to recognize our need for access to financial assistance to cover the cost of accessible smoke detectors.

The Ontario government's new legislation requires all homeowners to have smoke detectors on each floor in their homes, under the Fire Code which is regulated by your Ministry. This legislation has a detrimental impact on Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing homeowners who are unable to afford the steep cost of accessible smoke detectors that are visual, not audible.

The cost of purchasing and installing "visual" smoke detectors can soar as high as \$1,000 because Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people must purchase not only the audible alarm but the flashing strobe as well; both must be installed by an electrician which is another additional cost. The average homeowner incurs a cost of approximately \$160.

The requirement for all homeowners to have smoke detectors set up in their homes is an excellent step in ensuring that all homes will be safer in case of a fire emergency. However, this law has created an undue financial burden on Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing homeowners. Many of us are unable to comply with the law while some of us have installed audible smoke detectors which fail to protect us, just to comply with the law.

In light of increased fire-related deaths in the province, it is important to understand that Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing residents of Ontario are at higher risk due to the cost involved; there have already been documented fire-related deaths of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in both Manitoba and Nova Scotia.

Based on the 2006 census in Ontario from the Statistics Canada website (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 while sleeping at night, they would be unable to hear the audible smoke detector. This is a large number of Ontarians whose safety in their homes is at risk.

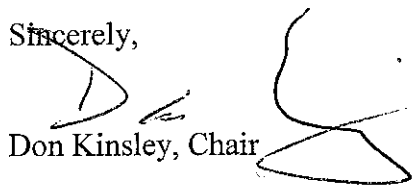
Funding is available for recipients of benefits from the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation eligibility screening for financial assistance for home modifications is targeted at individuals and families living near or below the poverty line, yet the many Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing homeowners who do not qualify for this program still cannot afford the expense.

Eligible tax deductions as determined by the Canada Revenue Agency provides a tax credit for taxpayers with a certified disability and medical expenses that extends a certain percentage of their income. Tax relief for the purchase of visual smoke detectors is not included.

Last but not least, fire safety for all Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals and their families should be the utmost priority. We hope that you will give this matter some serious consideration.

We look forward to hearing from you soon regarding the provision of financial assistance for visual smoke detectors. We ask that you please take the time to review the position paper developed by The Canadian Hearing Society (www.chs.ca) on this topic.

Sincerely,



Don Kinsley, Chair

cc: Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee – Mike Finnegan, Veronica Bickle, Gordon Ryall, Beverley Dooley, Kim Reid, Tony Flemming and Mirek Swiecicki

cc: Maggie Doherty-Gilbert, Regional Director, The Canadian Hearing Society, Peterborough, Durham and City of Kawartha Lakes Regions

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

cc: Jo-Ann Bentley, Provincial Coordinator, Communication Devices and Accessibility Program, The Canadian Hearing Society

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