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April 20, 2009

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

Dear Mr. Bartolucci,

This is a letter to express our deep disappointment and concern with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services' lack of concern and action regarding the fire safety of Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals in Ontario.

It is apparent from your letter, dated March 20, 2009, that the lives of people with hearing loss are not as important, or equal, as any other citizens living in Ontario. In your letter, you stated that it is optional for us to install the devices that are needed to save our lives in case of a fire emergency. Your response has degraded us into second-class citizens when it comes to fire safety, implying that our lives are *optional* and any deaths by fire that occur among the Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing population is regrettable but not important enough to take action upon.

We are insulted by your cavalier attitude towards this important matter.

If the Ontario government is truly committed to preventing all kinds of fire deaths regardless of who the individual may be, we urge you to reconsider your approach and take a more active role in ensuring that individuals with hearing loss will have equal access to fire safety, which may involve developing a financial assistance program for us to obtain the devices we need to have in our households.

There needs to be a better and more accessible program than the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program under the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation as its criteria are too strident for many homeowners with hearing loss to be able to qualify and its rules too inflexible to provide enough incentive for them to participate; a program such as the Assistive Devices Program under the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care is more suitable.

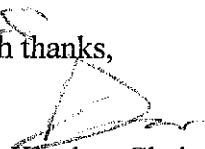
The Ontario Disability Support Program under the Ministry of Community and Social Services also provides financial assistance for recipients of disability benefits but this only covers a small percentage of people with hearing loss.


We are also discouraged that you are suggesting to us that we look elsewhere for financial assistance, such as local service clubs. Service clubs are committed to providing assistance for victims of poverty and misfortune. Many homeowners with hearing loss are not victims of poverty and would not feel it appropriate to approach service clubs to ask for financial assistance and would probably elect to go without accessible smoke detectors rather than ask for assistance.

There are other personal devices for Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals listed with the Assistive Devices Program under the Ministry of Health that financial assistance is provided for. We have advocated that the Ministry of Health add visual smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to their list but our request was turned down because these devices were not considered as "personalized assistive devices" but fall under home modifications.

We ask that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services take steps to improve this deplorable case of inequality and discrimination against people who are Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing. We also ask that you change your approach and endorse the goal of ensuring that the disparity and existing barriers in fire safety for Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals be removed and their lives be as valued as any other citizen in Ontario in the near future.

With thanks,


Don Kinsley, Chair


cc: Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee – Mike Finnegan, Veronica Bickle, Gordon Ryall, Beverley Dooley, Kim Reid, Tony Flemming, Linda Scott 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 Co-ordinator, Communication Devices Program, The Canadian Hearing Society
cc: Paul Smith, Executive Director, Ontario Association of the Deaf