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Brenda Kritzer, Director
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Corporate and Direct Services Division
Individual Eligibility Review Branch
3rd Floor, 5700 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON M2M 4K5

March 19, 2010

Dear Ms. Kritzer,

We are writing to you to advise that we have been informed by Mr. Patrick Burke, Fire Marshal of Ontario, that he had met with representatives from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to discuss the inclusion of visual smoke alarms in the Assistive Devices Program (ADP).

Mr. Burke has also advised us that he had been informed that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will have another independent review to consider the inclusion of visual smoke alarms in the ADP commencing sometimes this year. This comes as good news to us as we have been advocating for improved fire safety for Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents in Ontario for the past few years.

We hope that the Ministry will take the time to consider this important initiative and allow Mr. Burke continued involvement in this review by allowing him to make a presentation to the committee.

We were informed in October 2008 by the Ministry that the reason for not adding visual smoke detectors to the ADP was because visual smoke detectors fall under home modifications and not considered as personalized assistive devices.

What is not more personal than the risk of one's own death in his/her home? Smoke alarms communicate to the Deaf or Hard of Hearing resident when there is a fire emergency in their home. This goes beyond home modifications.

Furthermore, we would like to share with you:

- There are a growing number of baby boomers experiencing hearing loss so the number of Ontarians at risk of dying in a fire emergency is higher than in past years. Over 10% of Ontarians have a hearing loss.

- Existing programs designed to provide financial subsidies for homeowners fail to provide assistance to most homeowners with a hearing loss. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation only provide assistance for low-income earners and expect homeowners to remain in their house for five years before the loan is considered as paid in full. The Ontario Disability Support Program only covers the costs for people receiving social assistance.
- There are new smoke detectors now available in Ontario that does not require hard-wiring by an electrician which incurs variable costs. However, the costs remain expensive. The new devices will make it convenient for ADP to establish a fixed amount for financial assistance for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to access those most important items.

We hope that you will once again review this matter with utmost care and decide on this matter in the best interests of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ontarians and keep us informed of any decisions that may be made.

Sincerely,

Don Kinsley, Chair

cc: Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee – Mike Finnegan, Veronica Bickle, Gordon Ryall, Beverley Dooley, Kim Reid, David Hamen and Mirek Swiecicki
 cc: Patrick Burke, Fire Marshal of Ontario
 cc: The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
 cc: Maggie Doherty-Gilbert, Regional Director, The Canadian Hearing Society, Peterborough, Durham and City of Kawartha Lakes Regions
 cc: Chris Kenopic, Regional Director, The Canadian Hearing Society, Hamilton, Brant and Niagara Falls
 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: Dean Walker, Executive Director, Ontario Association of the Deaf
 cc: John Mans, Treasurer, Ontario Association of the Deaf
 cc: Michel David, President, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Ontario Chapter
 cc: Valerie Eaton, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Toronto Branch
 cc: Wayne Arthurs, MPP, Pickering-Scarborough East
 cc: John O'Toole, MPP, Durham
 cc: Joe Dickson, MPP, Ajax-Pickering
 cc: Jerry Ouellette, MPP, Oshawa
 cc: Christine Elliott, MPP, Whitby-Oshawa
 cc: Rick Johnson, MPP, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock