



RIGHTS OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE IN ENTERTAINMENT

If you are DEAF or HARD OF HEARING, you have a right to clear, “effective” communication to enjoy shows and events at theaters, on television, on the internet, and at stadiums or other places of entertainment when reasonably possible.

What is “Effective” Communication?

- Communication that is clear enough that you can understand what is happening as well as hearing people can.

Examples of places and forms of entertainment that must provide clear, “effective” communication include:

- Movie theaters
- Broadway theaters
- Sports Stadiums and arenas
- Amusement Parks
- Festivals
- Televisions
- Videos on computers, iPads and “smart phones”
- Schools that offer entertainment open to the public, or entertainment offered by your child’s school (school play, school performance).

Examples of “Communication Aids and Services” include:

- Using qualified sign language interpreters.
- Providing assistive listening devices (captioned glasses for theatres, hearing equipment, but not personal hearing aids).
- Using Communication Access Realtime Translation (known as "CART" or “realtime captioning”) - when a person uses a special machine to type everything that is said on a computer so you can read what others are saying.
- Providing closed captioning – which is when the spoken words of a movie or video are written down and you can choose to see them or not.
- Providing open captioning – which is when the spoken words of a show or video are written down so that everyone sees them.
- Providing special seating where you can hear better, see the interpreter, speech-read the speaker, or read the CART.

Certain places and forms of entertainment are required to have specific communication aids and services readily available. For example:

- When sound is part of an event at a stadium or arena, the place must give assistive listening devices (hearing equipment) to people who need them so that they can hear better. (At least one court also required a stadium to have captioning or another accommodation for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.)
- Televisions must have the choice for closed captioning for most of its shows.

- Under a new law, over the next few years more and more videos shown on computers, iPads and smart phones will be required to have closed captioning available.

Places of entertainment must also provide other communication aids and services to help people who are deaf or hard of hearing follow what is going on. The right communication aid or service will not be the same for every person or every event. For instance, a Broadway show may be required to provide a qualified interpreter and arrange seating close to the interpreter for someone who is deaf. Or the Broadway theater may be required to provide some form of captioning or assistive listening device (hearing equipment) to people who are hard of hearing. Courts have required movie theaters to provide closed captioning (captioning that is seen only by those who ask to see it), but not open captioning (where all theater-goers would see the words).

A place of entertainment must provide communication aids and services even if there is some cost to provide the communication aid or service. A place of entertainment cannot charge you money for the provision of an interpreter or other communication aid or service.

If you let places of entertainment know that you are deaf or hard of hearing and want to enjoy their program, they must ask you what will help make communication clear. But they do not always have to use exactly what you ask them to use for clear communication. If they can find another way to communicate with you that you understand clearly, they can use this other way to communicate with you.

What can you do to make sure you have clear communication at places of entertainment?

1. As soon as you decide to go to the event, ask the place of entertainment for the help you need. This will give them time to get the communication aids and services set up.
2. Ask the place of entertainment for exactly what you need (special seating, accommodations) and explain why that will work best for you. The place of entertainment will be more likely to give you what you need if they understand why you need it.
3. If possible, give contact information for organizations that can send interpreters or captioners or equipment that can allow you to enjoy and have access to a place of entertainment. Be sure to give the name of the organization, telephone number or email address.
4. The day before you go to the event, contact them again and ask if they have made the arrangements for a communication aid or service that will work for you.

If you believe you have been discriminated against by any place of entertainment you may file a Complaint with:

- Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Disability Rights Section - NYA
Washington, DC 20530
- Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission at –
http://www.phrc.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/file_a_complaint/18976

Contact Information

If you need more information or need help, please contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP) at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TDD). The email address is: intake@disabilityrightspa.org.

The mission of Disability Rights Pennsylvania is to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Due to our limited resources, Disability Rights Pennsylvania cannot provide individual services to every person with advocacy and legal issues. Disability Rights Pennsylvania prioritizes cases that have the potential to result in widespread, systemic changes to benefit persons with disabilities. While we cannot provide assistance to everyone, we do seek to provide every individual with information and referral options.

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PLEASE NOTE: For information in alternative formats or a language other than English, contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania at 800-692-7443, Ext. 400, TDD: 877-375-7139 or intake@disabilityrightspa.org.