



TORONTO INTERNATIONAL DEAF FILM & ARTS FESTIVAL

www.tidfaf.ca

Notice of Consultation: 2013-155

Good day Ladies, Gentlemen, and the CRTC Commissioners,

My name is Catherine MacKinnon, and I am a Filmmaker and Festival Director of TIDFAF, Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival. Thank you for inviting me to take part in today's hearings. I am honoured to be here today.

A bit of background regarding of TIDFAF:

The Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival (TIDFAF) promotes Cultural Diversity, and the celebration of "Deaf Cinema", through the visual medium. The bi-annual Festival showcases the work of talented national and international Deaf, hard of hearing, deafened, deaf blind filmmakers, and artists as well as those who produce works in collaboration with deaf and hearing communities.

We recently held our fourth festival, May 9th to 12th 2013 which was a resounding success, 90% of the films have subtitles, voice overs, sound design & music in their films. We also had films with audio description for blind and low vision audience members, so as to be able to participate in the festival. We provided a full accessible environment, ASL American Sign Language, Langue des Signes québécoise, LSQ, and International Sign language interpreters, CART-Real Time Captioning services for deafened adults. Our festival venue spaces is also wheelchair accessible.

What is a Video Relay Service?

Video Relay Services (VRS) is a video telecommunication service that allows culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals to communicate over the Internet using video enabled technologies (e.g. video telephones and similar technologies) with hearing people in real-time, via a signed language-spoken language interpreter.

As a Filmmaker, I have produced several films, for both deaf and hearing. I lived in Los Angeles, California from 2007 to 2011. I often fly back and forth from Los Angeles to Toronto as my other role for TIDFAF and film productions. I've used the American Video Relay services quite often in my line of work as a Filmmaker. The accessibility of that service really helped in my career, as I was able to hire production crews, book equipment, and put together production-shooting details via Video Relay Service.

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However, I also was able to speak to my family members here in Canada from Los Angeles. The ASL interpreter would tell me the background noise, and who ever is speaking in the background to identify voices. It's something I never experienced before, as the interpreter also would tell me the tone of the person's voice, noting a range of emotions, happy, or sad. It's amazing to have this technology. The call times were quick and efficient, and their customer services representative is available in person on the screen, if there's a technical issue.

For example: I worked on a film set of an award winning American independent film, entitled "The Hammer" a biopic based on a real life UFC Fighter, Matt Hamill. While on the set with WIFI capabilities, I was able to make calls via VRS, secure catering services, complete any pertaining details needed for the shoot.

The technology I used is my Apple Mac book pro laptop, iChat box, that has VRS companies on my list and I was able to easily click on it and make a call. I'm oral deaf, and another aspect of using the Video Relay Services Technology was the VCO-Voice Carry over. I was able to use my cell phone and the interpreter hooked up my cell number call to their system and I was able to use my voice to speak into the cell phone, I would watch the interpreter on the computer screen of what the other person is saying, and I would respond back by speaking in Spoken English. It's very beneficial to have this part of VRS technology as an option, of both using ASL and Spoken English. I was able to use this system to speak to my family members and in my career as a Filmmaker.

When I returned back to Canada, it was a very difficult adjustment not having the VRS, as I was so accustomed to using it there with a sense of confidence and independence. I really felt the loss of confidence and independence here. As for the TIDFAF, we had to rely on a hearing board member to make a few calls from other deaf and hard of hearing board members. I feel that's not an appropriate thing to do and where's the equal access? Our Festival is expanding and quite often we have to make phone calls to our funders and sponsors, as sometimes email is not always the best communication system. We're a growing Festival and there is a huge need of a VRS here in Canada for our work and ability to have functionally equivalent access to communication services for deaf and hard of hearing consumers such as us. We're hard working and committed passionate festival with a unique board of directors with a range of backgrounds and experience who are deaf, hard of hearing and hearing board members.

Current Canadian System: I recently used an on line relay service here in Canada. To my dismay, I had to wait for an hour and a half, patiently waiting to make a call and it was only lasted two minutes to book an appointment. The Relay also does not identify themselves as a Male or Female operator. In U.S., while using their on line text relay service, they always identify the gender of the operator.

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There's a real need for a formal training for these operators to provide a better more efficient service here in Canada. It is with hope that there will be improvement of the services here in our country. Our next bi annual TIDFAF Festival will be held in May 2015, and hopefully, by that time, the VRS will be implemented, so we can achieve our goals in reaching out to the hearing film and arts community via VRS with equal access and create more opportunities to network from our deaf and hard of hearing board members.

I thank you for your time in listening to my testimonial today. TIDFAF strongly supports implementing Video Relay Services in Canada. We look forward to achieving the goal together along with other national and provincial organizations, grassroots community organizations, and CRTC to implement and establish a National VRS in Canada, in both ASL and LSQ.

Thank you.

Respectively submitted by:

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