

Accessibility- And Hearing-Related Disabilities

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September is National Deaf Awareness Month. I am neither deaf nor do I have a hearing-related disability.

I do have family and friends who have hearing-related disabilities. In thinking of the upcoming month, I started to think about accessibility related to those who are D/deaf and/or have hearing or audio-related disabilities.

I remember the first time I saw close captioning as a child. I asked why there were words on this TV and not my TV at home. It was explained to me that one of my family members could not hear and the captions were there to help them understand the dialogue on the TV.

I vividly remember thinking “Wow. This is great. I don’t need this, but I understand that someone else might and I’m so happy this exists for them.” I also recall the first time seeing ASL (American Sign Language) interpreters at concerts. Again, I thought “Wow, this is great!”

The previous two examples are just two examples of ensuring TV, music, entertainment, whatever it may be, is accessible to everyone. We have the ability to make things more accessible. Don’t we have the responsibility to do so? Unfortunately, some don’t seem to think so.

Early in 2020, in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a judge ordered that former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was required to have an ASL interpreter during his briefings. The White House was also ordered to have ASL interpreters at their COVID-19 briefings.

With something so important and possibly life-altering like the COVID-19 pandemic, how were we holding such important briefings without ASL? How could we ignore the needs of millions of people who not only use, but require ASL?

According to a report from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 36 million people have some sort of hearing loss, something that seems to increase dramatically with age. Not all hearing-related disabilities can utilize the same accommodation. I personally have learned a lot in the recent years and I continue to learn. It’s important that our communities continue to learn as well.

Thankfully today we frequently see ASL interpreters at events. We have hearing loops in public spaces. We have open captions in movie theaters and Broadway shows. These things are becoming more common, as they should be, though it’s long overdue.

In New York we have a number of organizations that advocate for and work with people who are D/deaf or have a hearing or audio-related disability.

If you need assistance or have questions, you can reach out to CIDNY at 212 674-2300 by phone, 646 350-2681 by video phone, or email at info@cidny.org.