**Bill 22-957, the “Open Movie Captioning Requirement Act of 2018”**

Testimony of

**Jarvis Grindstaff**

Commissioner

Before the

Committee of the Whole

Council of the District of Columbia

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

John A. Wilson Building

Room 500

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC, 20004

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Time: 12:30 PM

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and the members of the Committee of the Whole.

My name is Jarvis Grindstaff and I live in Ward 6. In 2017 I was appointed by Mayor Bowser to serve as a Commissioner on the DC Commission on Persons with Disabilities (DCCPD). I am here today to speak, not only on behalf of the Commission, but also as a resident of the District who uses the services and programs offered in our community.

As an Advisory Board established in 2008 by the Mayor of DC, DCCPD works to inform and advise the District Government on programs, services, facilities, and activities that impact the lives of residents with disabilities. Our Commission is made up primarily of people with disabilities, advocates, and allies, and we understand firsthand the importance of equal access for people with disabilities that is comparable to the access enjoyed by our peers without disabilities.

I was born deaf and am from a deaf family and use American Sign Language to communicate. From my experience as a deaf person, from a deaf family, what I notice is that movies with open captioning are more reliable and provide full and equal access rather than caption glasses and captioning boxes. One memory I have was the afternoon of Christmas Day in the 2010’s.my deaf family including my deaf grandparents went to a movie theater to watch a movie. When we entered the movie theater we noticed that everyone was chatting and excited about the new movies but we entered feeling so embarrassed because we were carrying a giant captioning box that sits on top of black pole flags. We were also frustrated when half of the devices didn’t work. Also, I remember a time when my grandfather visited a movie theatre that offered captioning glasses but my Grandfather couldn’t use them due to the fact that he wore thick medical eyeglasses, thus denying him the opportunity to enjoy a film.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), public accommodations are supposed to take the necessary steps to ensure that no individual with a disability is treated different than other individuals. However, using captioning devices is treating us differently. It does not provide us with the same experience and access to that of our hearing peers.

In the rare case, when I finally have a chance to watch movies with open captioning I always feel like I am able to breathe the air freely and enjoy the film without having to worry about accessibility or whether or not the captions are going to work.

DC has one of the largest Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing populations in our nation. This is in part because of Gallaudet University, the first and only University in the world tailored toward Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students. Students, professors, educators, and elected officials from across our nation and around the world have attended Gallaudet University, and many have remained in the District upon their graduation. The District’s Deaf residents are instrumental influences for the integration of Deaf culture into the broader community. I, myself, am currently a Graduate student at Gallaudet pursuing a dual degree.

Providing open captions directly on films allows patrons who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing to enjoy a film equally to that of their hearing peers. Open captions do not just benefit individuals who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing but also:

* People with other disabilities such as Individuals with auditory or communication disabilities, autism, and learning disabilities.
* Non-native English speakers who may rely on captions to fully understand what is said.
* Children who are learning to read
* Older adults
* And it allows patrons to better understand the complex movie with many characters, plot lines, themes, and intricate details.

If enacted, the Open Movie Captioning Requirement Act of 2018 will not only improve the movie-going experience for residents and visitors who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing, but also it improves the experience for the whole community.

We, the Commission on Persons with Disabilities, urge the Council to consider passing the Open Movie Captioning Requirement Act of 2018. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you. We invite the Council to discuss this matter further or to answer any questions that you might have.