

It's a Fact: The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease



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HLAA represents 48 million people with hearing loss in the U.S., but your one voice can be powerful in helping us achieve great results.

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Advocacy is one of the most important functions of HLAA. The HLAA Public Policy and Advocacy Agenda helps define our mission and goals and provides us direction on our advocacy issues. We have a proud history and successful track record of being your voice at the federal level—whether it's with the Federal Communications Commission, the Food and Drug Administration, the White House, Congress, state legislators, and everywhere we know there are issues that affect your lives and where we know we can make lives better for people with hearing loss.

That's what HLAA does routinely and successfully, but frankly, we need your help. There are times when we are talking to federal or state agencies and policy makers about how serious issues concerning people with hearing loss, and how thousands of people are not getting the services they need.

We often hear comments from the FCC and other ruling bodies that sound like this: "No one, or very few people, have ever told us; we aren't getting any complaints." Or, "If it is so important to your membership and the people you represent, why aren't they loudly voicing their concerns to us, and writing letters or filing complaints?"

HLAA is highly respected by legislators and policy makers as a national organization, but we also need individual letters and complaints to be filed to document the assertions that we are making.

Examples of When We Need You to be Heard

A few months ago, state agency representatives came to our office in Bethesda and asked us to be sure that HLAA members showed up for meetings and voiced their concerns because there were likely going to be people from other disability groups and from the Deaf community. They said our voices representing people with all levels of hearing loss were not loud enough. The good news is we heard that message and our members responded.

Last fall, we joined with other consumer groups and the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) to file joint recommendations with the Department of Justice (DOJ) regarding its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on captioning equipment in movie theaters in the United States. After several weeks of discussions, the five organizations agreed on a set of recommendations to the DOJ to improve access to movies for patrons with hearing loss. As a result, HLAA is encouraging people to give theaters another chance and go back to the movies.

However, last week I was talking with an HLAA member who had gone to the movies only to find the equipment not working and theater staff unable to help her. I asked her if she complained to the staff or called or wrote to anyone about her problem, and she said, "No." She just sat through the movie, unsatisfied and unable to enjoy the performance. What she didn't realize is, as HLAA members, we all have a responsibility to be an advocate for ourselves and others like us.

Another example is when a member called our office to ask us to file a complaint to a cable TV channel because the captions were so bad. She thought because we are a national organization they would listen to us. Part of that is true, we do work on captioning and have seen positive change, but there is still work to

HLAA Public Policy and Advocacy Agenda

bit.ly/AdvocacyPolicy

When a Complaint Means More than Just Complaining How to File Complaints by Lise Hamlin

May/June 2014 *Hearing Loss Magazine*, page 34
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FCC's New Consumer Help Center

www.hearingloss.org/content/fcc-consumer-help-center-0

be done. The truth is that the FCC still needs to hear from that one person who can't enjoy her favorite shows. They need documented written complaints.

Why File a Complaint?

Don't feel you are only one voice in a sea of millions. HLAA represents 48 million Americans with hearing loss; you give the personal voice businesses and policy makers need to hear. Sometimes just voicing your concerns might be enough through a conversation with a policy maker or staff person, but if that doesn't work, take the time to file a complaint or write a letter.

- If you quietly accept the status quo, you are certainly not going to resolve the issue.
- Filing a complaint underscores the seriousness of the issue and your resolve to get action.
- Filing a complaint will increase the visibility of HLAA and backs up the advocacy work we do at the national level.
- When you put something in writing, it is harder to ignore.
- Filing your complaint may get others to follow your lead and do the same thing.
- Filing your complaint might give agency staff and leadership the ammunition they need to take action.
- Filing a complaint provides a permanent record of your actions.
- Filing a complaint gives you an opportunity to become an agent of change—the change you want to see in the world.

For HLAA Chapter leaders, teaching people how to file complaints and why they should could be a great program for you to provide at upcoming meetings. HLAA staff at the national office is happy to help and there are several tools and resources on www.hearingloss.org to assist you. Many of the federal and state agencies are making filing complaints easier and will walk you through the steps.

There are many ways for us to be advocates, like leading a chapter meeting, helping someone learn how to find a good audiologist, teaching someone about assistive listening devices and what to ask for in public places, but we cannot forget that a critical advocacy strategy is to file complaints with federal and state agencies, and tell our stories to decision makers in restaurants, movie theaters, places of worship and anywhere there are problems with accessibility. Otherwise, we will not achieve the change we are working toward.

When we are successful in making change and see responses back from agencies and policy makers, let's not forget to also compliment them and encourage them to keep making progress on our issues. We want to take the time to complain, but be sure to follow up with compliments when appropriate.

Together we can cover a lot of ground. **HLM**

Online Learning

Registration is open for the HLAA Hearing Loss Support Specialist Training (HLSST)

HLSST is an online, self-paced training program which provides core knowledge for individuals who work with people with hearing loss. The training consists of four classes with as many as fourteen lessons in each class. Lessons are composed of multiple readings and captioned videos. The classes are:

Class I: Hearing Loss: The Basics

Class II: Coping with
Hearing Loss

Class III: Hearing Assistive
Technology and Services

Class IV: Advocacy, Resources
and the Law

You may register for one class at a time or register for the entire program at once for the discounted price of \$225. For complete details, table of contents, and registration information, visit hearingloss.org/content/hlstst.

Questions? Email Nancy Macklin at nmacklin@hearingloss.org.

