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CANADIAN HEARING SOCIETY
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE L'OUÏE

November 17th, 2011

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

Dear Premier:

**Re: Visual Fire Alarms**

Following up on previous correspondence, CHS's Day at Queen's Park, and outstanding issues regarding financial support to mitigate the cost of visual fire alarm devices required by the revised Provincial Fire Code Regulation of March 1, 2006

Thank you for your letter dated March 30, 2011, and a letter dated June 6, 2011 from Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and long-Term Care. However, these responses do not address issues relating specifically to financial support to mitigate the cost of visual fire alarms for Deaf and hard of hearing Ontarians who are not eligible for ODSP Supports to Income and who experience undue financial hardship to comply with the provincial fire code requirement. To comply with the code and be accessible, visual fire alarms are required for culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard of hearing residents in their homes, rental housing, and public and private long-term care facilities. In addition, amendments to the Ontario Fire Code are necessary for the inclusion of visual fire alarms. This is a matter of access, financial inequity, financial undue hardship and quite simply a matter of life and death.

To provide you with the background, I have attached our letter dated March 11, 2011, our publication "Why Ontario needs visual alarms", and our press release: CHS Raises Awareness of Visual Fire Alarms During Fire Prevention Week Oct. 9-15, 2011. The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) partnered with fire departments in Ottawa, Brockville, Belleville, Markham and St. Catharines to raise awareness. A miniature model home was used to demonstrate visual fire alarms at the fire departments' public awareness activities.

Once again, we are writing to draw your attention to this urgent and immediate concern of the rights Deaf and hard of hearing Ontarians have to accessible, affordable notification systems and compliance with the revised Provincial Fire Code Regulation of March 1, 2006.

Serious fire incidents have captured provincial and national news coverage including a recent incident involving eight people – including a deaf couple – injured in Scarborough on November 10, 2011. News clippings are attached.

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care senior official advised CHS that coverage for visual fire alarms is not included in the Ministry's Assistive Devices Programs (ADP) and will not be included in any ADP expansion despite the fact is that Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care have received letters of support from Fire Marshall of Ontario, several cities' fire prevention officers and Ontario Municipal Fire Prevention Officers. These alarms are emergency communication devices that save lives. Safety and compliance must be equitable; accessible; and must not result in financial hardship to the segment of the population with hearing loss.

We continue to work with local fire departments, Fire Marshall of Ontario, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs and Ontario Municipal Fire Prevention Officers Association, local MPPs along with elected representatives from municipal and federal governments to ensure that the Government of Ontario implements the following measures:

1) Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to reconsider visual fire alarm devices under the Ministry's Assistive Devices Program (ADP) in the ADP expansion

2) Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to amend the Ontario Fire Code to incorporate visual fire alarms and duty of landlords and owners of rental housing and long-term care facilities to comply.

In the next few weeks we will contact your office to arrange a meeting with Gary Malkowski, CHS Special Advisor, Public Affairs and myself to address issues of visual fire alarms, access, equity, awareness, and regulations.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these critical issues.

Sincerely,

Chris Kenopic
President & CEO

cc: Tim Hudak, PC Leader of Ontario, MPP Niagara West-Glanbrook
Andrea Horwath, NDP Leader of Ontario, MPP Hamilton-Centre
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Hon. John Milloy, Minister of Community and Social Services
Hon. Glem Murray, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs
Eric Hoskins, MPP St. Paul's

Ted Wieclawek, Fire Marshall of Ontario, Office of the Fire Marshall
Tim Beckett, Fire Chief/President, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs
Chantelle Cosgrove, President, Ont. Municipal Fire Prevention Officers Association
Andre Marin, Ontario Ombudsman
Ivana Petricone, Executive Director, ARCH Disability Law Centre
Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission
Silvana Mancuso, President, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Ont. Chapter
Jackie Plant, President, Ontario Association of the Deaf