

August 5, 2005

The Right Honourable Paul Martin
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Re: Consultation of National Disability Groups

Dear Sir:

I am writing to you to express the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association's grave concern over a trend we have been witnessing in the past few months with respect to developing advisory committees within the Federal Government for persons with disabilities. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association is the only national not for profit association that represents the needs of hard of hearing and deafened Canadians. Incorporated in 1982, our association represents the approximately three million people in Canada that have some form of hearing loss, 10 % of the population of Canada. These numbers prove that hearing loss is the largest disability in Canada, and with our current environmental situation, are rapidly increasing. In the next 7 years extrapolation of these statistics indicates that 17% of the population will have some significant degree of hearing loss.

The specific concern I would like to raise with you is with reference to a letter received in our office on June 24, 2005 from the Honourable Jean-C. Lapierre, Minister of Transportation. This letter advised our association that the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation (ACAT) of which our association has been a member for many years, is currently being restructured. Rather than having organizations as representatives on this committee it is being opened up to a selection process of individuals. With all due respect to the operations of the Minister of Transportation the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association has great concerns with this process. With this in mind we have written to the Minister of Transportation and copied your office on these concerns. To date we have received no reply.

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On August 3, 2005 this same issue was once again brought to our attention in respect of another government department, The Canada Revenue Agency. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association previously had representation on an advisory committee in 1996 under the auspice of the Honourable Minister Jane Stewart. We received a notice as follows:

"I am pleased to announce that the CRA has created the Disability Advisory Committee. This committee will provide a forum to identify the needs and expectations of the disability community," stated Minister McCallum. "The Disability Advisory Committee is an important consultative forum through which members can provide helpful advice, comments, and suggestions on tax measures for persons with disabilities. It is crucial that persons with disabilities be treated equally and fairly, and I am confident that the members of the committee will help us achieve this."

Sir, please note the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association as a national organization is concerned that, once again, our association, the only association that represents hard of hearing and deafened Canadians has not been asked to submit any names of a person to sit on this advisory committee to represent the interests of over three million Canadians.

Consulting the CRA website we have investigated the background of the people appointed to this committee. We find that the needs of Canadians with hearing loss are, once again, not represented. In addition, this particular website reveals that many issues are not referenced. For example: How were these people selected? Why was our association not consulted to ensure the needs of the largest disability group in Canada is represented? Is this a voluntary committee or are the people on this committee being reimbursed for their advice to the Minister of Revenue?

As you can see, after many years of dedicated service, our association has been told that our advisory services is no longer needed at Transportation Agency and now we are seeing that we were not even consulted or considered to sit on a Disability Advisory Committee for the Canada Revenue Agency. We are very concerned with this new trend your government seems to be taking with reference to advice from the national disability associations.

With all due respect to your position, I would like to remind you that the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association was a very active member of the Andy Scott Task Force that took began in May 1996 resulting in the report *"Equal Citizenship for Canadians with*

Disabilities The will to act” in October 1996. The President of our Association at that time, Mr. Fred Clark, was one of the three advisory persons with a disability that donated his time to travel across Canada representing persons with disabilities. This Task Force, of which you were one of the sponsoring Ministers, collected information from communities all across Canada. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association was present during the meeting that took place to introduce the results of this task force. Sir, you were in attendance at this meeting, in fact you stayed after the other Ministers left this meeting and assured us that you would always give persons with disabilities a high profile and would see that the recommendations in the report would be adhered to. With this in mind, I would like to draw your attention to Recommendation Number 27 of this report:

For discussion still in preliminary stages, the Government of Canada should explicitly reflect in its opening position, a requirement that there be:

- a) *A commitment to serving people with disabilities proportional to their representation in the working age population of the particular province or territory, and that the accountability framework be revised so that it does not systemically exclude people with disabilities.*
- b) *A commitment to ensure that supports and measures delivered to people with disabilities through third parties are delivered by organizations of and for people with disabilities where such organizations exist.*

People with disabilities are best qualified to serve this population. The expertise of these organizations extends from their work in coaching governments on how programs and services should be delivered to their everyday work with individuals.

- c) *A requirement to ensure that third parties or other service deliverers are held accountable for making facilities, programs and services accessible to people with disabilities.*

As you can see, the above recommendation directly refers to the expertise and knowledge that national disability organizations provide to the federal government. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, as a national association and the only association that represents the needs of hard of hearing and deafened Canadians, is now curious as to why this recommendation has been so blatantly disregarded. Is this trend going to be the future of disability organizations? Are we now going to see the “so called experts” in our specialized fields, hand picked by government people,

representing the needs of our community? How will we be able to ensure the needs of our respective communities are represented on these committees? How are we able to report back to our communities that your government is respecting our needs? How are we able to support the decisions made by a committee that has no knowledge of our community? How can we support these advisory committees when we have no input on whom or why these people were picked to represent us? Where does the expertise of these advisory committees come from? It would appear that we are moving backwards in advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Canada, rather than moving forward.

The national disabilities organizations in Canada have worked very hard to establish knowledge of the issues that we deal with on a daily basis and respect for their expertise on these issues. We are the experts in our fields of knowledge; this has been proven in the past and was confirmed during the Andy Scott Task Force. Why are you allowing your current government to take this right away from our organizations? Why are you allowing this government to regress rather than move forward? Why not take advantage of the best expertise that is readily available?

Sir, we feel that as a national disability organization the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association deserves answers to these questions. We also feel that we have been completely overlooked in the selection of “advisory committees” for the federal government. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association works very hard to address the needs of our membership. We are a national organization that reaches out to all areas of Canada. We have a duly elected national board of directors that have been selected to represent the broad geographic area that comprises Canada. We find the lack of consultation with our community to be negligent on behalf of your government officials. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss this very important situation. We would like to work with your government to ensure the needs of persons with hearing loss in Canada are represented on these advisory committees.

We would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to further discuss the benefits that collaboration between the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and your government could do to move the disability agenda forward.

Yours truly,



Carole Willans-Théberge
President

Janice McNamara
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Stephen Harper, Leader of the Opposition
The Honourable Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Mr. Peter Julian, Disability Agenda New Democratic Party
Ms. Carol Skelton, Conservative Party, Social Development & Public Health
Mr. Steven Fletcher, Conservative Party, Health Critic
Mr. Colin Cantlie, Chairperson Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Transportation Committee
National Disability Organizations: CCD, CAILC, CACL, CNIB, NEADS, LDAC,
CPA