

Gray Panthers Santa Barbara Network



March 24, 2022

Dear honorable members of the board:

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Richard Solomon

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The Gray Panthers Santa Barbara Network was incorporated as a nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation in 2020. Our membership has grown steadily since then and includes residents from all parts of Santa Barbara County. Our mission is to promote social and economic justice and oppose discrimination of all types. We have provided a wide range of educational programming aimed at older adults and we have successfully advocated at the local, State and national level on a variety of different issues. The intent of this letter is to advocate for those who are deaf or hard of hearing and ask that you institute closed captioning for all of your County televised meetings.

Gray Panthers Santa Barbara Network appreciates and is impressed with your use of technology during Covid. This has guaranteed full public participation at your meetings during a very challenging time. However, now, as we begin to return to some sense of “normal” meeting protocols, we believe it is time to institute closed captioning services for the deaf and hard of hearing community members. The National Institute of Deafness and Communication Disorders as well as the Hearing Loss Association of America reports that hearing loss is the third most prevalent health condition for older adults, that 48 million or 20% of the US population (of any age) has a hearing loss significant enough to impact daily activities and, 28.8 million people could benefit from the use of hearing aids. It is the law (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990) to provide equal communication access to governmental activities for the public.

Additionally, the Federal Communications Commission Consumer Guide for Closed Captioning on Television states that the FCC rules for TV closed captioning are required to ensure that viewers who are deaf and hard of hearing “have full access to programming...” and that close captions must be accurate, synchronous, complete and properly placed.

We urge you to implement closed captioning technology so that those who are deaf and hard of hearing can fully access your public meetings. As you begin budget deliberations, we respectfully request that funding for this vital technology be included in your final spending plan. We believe that the time to act is now. Equal access and transparency are some of the things we know you value, and closed captioning of your meetings is an important tool to achieve that goal.

Sincerely,

Richard Solomon
Chair, Gray Panthers Santa Barbara Network