Wake Chapter Newsletter Oct 2026

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Join Our Team for the November 8 NC Walk4Hearing

Join the HLAA Wake Chapter at WakeMed Soccer Park (201 Soccer Park Drive) in Cary on Sunday, November 8, for the annual North Carolina Walk4Hearing!

The North Carolina event is part of a nationwide campaign conducted by the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) that raises funds for education, advocacy and support for people with hearing loss. It's a powerful community effort, bringing people together, breaking down barriers and empowering everyone with hearing loss to succeed.

Teams of family and friends join with the HLAA Wake Chapter and nonprofit and business partners to raise funds for local programs and promote hearing health. Every step we take together celebrates our community's strength and inspires others to join our cause.

Support our Wake HLAA Chapter walk team. Visit the North Carolina Walk4Hearing page, where you can "Register" and select "Wake HLAA Chapter" to join our team as a walker. Or, if you prefer, you can select "Donate to Event," search for "Wake HLAA Chapter" and then donate to any individual walker on our team.



Funds raised by the team are shared between our chapter and the HLAA national organization. The walk is the chapter's primary fundraising effort and supports our continued operation, outreach activities and scholarships for worthy local high school graduates with hearing loss.

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Virginia Passes Movie Captioning Law

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) supported an open-captioned movie bill that went into effect on July 1, 2026.

"Want to go see a movie today?" The answer isn't always easy if you have a hearing loss.



Going to the movies should be enjoyable for everyone. Yet for many people, a trip to the theater often comes with uncertainty. Will captioning devices be available? Will they be charged and functioning properly? Too often, the answer is no.

That's why accessibility advocates across Virginia, including HLAA members, pushed for a better solution: open-captioned movie screening requirements via the passage of HB 602. Their efforts paid off. The bill passed and, since July 1, 2026, Virginia requires movie theaters with five or more locations in the state to offer open-captioned showings for widely-shown films, helping more people share the moviegoing experience with family and friends.

"My husband Ken has hearing loss," says Claire Fornsel, co-vice president of the HLAA Virginia Beach Chapter. "In the past, he would go along to movies he couldn't hear, just because he loves me. Now, with the passage of the Virginia movie theater open captioning legislation, we can enjoy the entertainment together."

A Worthwhile Accessibility Victory
Open captions display dialogue and important sound cues directly on the movie screen, allowing everyone in the audience to see them. Unlike closed-captioning devices for individuals, they don't require special equipment that can be lost, broken or just plain awkward.

HB 602 also improves public awareness of when open-captioned showings will happen. Theaters must now clearly label these viewings with an "OC" designation and provide information about how patrons can request open captioning later in a film's run.

All of these changes combine to empower people with hearing loss – or anyone else who enjoys open captioning – to make plans with the same confidence as anyone else. It replaces uncertainty with inclusion, dignity and equal access.

How Advocates and Lawmakers Made It Happen
This legislation was championed by Delegate Phil Hernandez of the 94th District, who was approached in August 2025 by an accessibility advocate inspired by successful open caption policies in other states. Hernandez, whose sister is deaf, embraced the effort as part of his broader commitment to making Virginia more accessible for everyone.

He sought support and guidance from Neil Snyder, HLAA's director of public policy, and accessibility-focused organizations such as Access Virginia and the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH). The bill was introduced in January 2026, quickly passed both legislative chambers and was signed into law on April 6, 2026, by Governor Abigail Spanberger.

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Virginia Passes Movie Captioning Law (Continued)

The measure benefited from grassroots advocacy by members of the HLAA Virginia Beach, Virginia Peninsula and Greater Richmond Chapters. Kenneth Reichert, president of the HLAA Virginia Beach Chapter and a 30-year U.S. Navy veteran with service-connected hearing loss, spoke publicly about the need for accessible movie experiences at a town hall event held by Del. Hernandez. Other HLAA members throughout Virginia, including chapter leaders Angela Hill, Kathy Richter, Keith McAllister, Claire Fornsel, Richard Wiltse, Bobby Graves and Larry Herbert, reached out to state lawmakers urging support.

Their success demonstrates how local advocates can drive meaningful change when they collaborate with legislators and community organizations.



Left to right: Claire Fornsel, co-vice president, HLAA Virginia Beach Chapter; Tiago Campos, Access Virginia board member; Delegate Phil Hernandez; Jane Popkin, president of Virginia Hearing Loss Support Network; Lois Boyle, executive director of Access Virginia; and Ken Reichert, president, HLAA Virginia Beach Chapter, at a town hall event in Norfolk, VA.

Positive Ripple Effects of Accessibility Improvements
The positive effects of this new law will reach far beyond people with hearing loss. As Claire's experience shows, people who may not need open captions themselves can now share the experience with friends and loved ones who do.

"Imagine grandparents taking their grandchildren to see the latest Disney or Pixar film," says her husband, Ken Reichert. "In the past, hearing loss might have made the outing frustrating or even impossible. With open-captioned screenings, the whole family can enjoy the film together without the need for specialized equipment."

In addition, viewing movies and videos with captions can reinforce literacy skills in school-age children whether or not they have hearing loss, by connecting spoken words with text in real time. (And English-language learners often use captions to strengthen language comprehension.) Advocates also note that many younger viewers already prefer watching content with captions turned on, regardless of hearing ability.

What's Next for Open Captions
With this success, Virginia joins a growing movement that includes Hawaii, Maryland, Washington, D.C., New York City and Washington State, all of which have adopted open-captioning regulations. Each victory smooths the path for other jurisdictions to follow.

And for advocates across the country, these wins serve as a powerful reminder that meaningful change often begins when community members speak up and work together.

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Participate in Survey About Communication at Restaurants

A student at Central Michigan University is conducting research on the communication accessibility and accommodations of restaurants for people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing, and he is seeking help from members of Hearing Loss Association of America chapters.

Isaac Cole, an undergraduate honors student studying Communication Sciences and Disorders, is asking HLAA members to take a survey he has created and share it with friends who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing or work in the restaurant service industry.

“We hope that with this survey, we can identify barriers to accessible communication at restaurants,” says Cole.

Requirements to take the survey are:

- Live in the U.S.
- Be over 18 years old.
- Be one or more of the following:
  - A person who is d/Deaf
  - A person who is hard of hearing
  - A service worker at a full-service restaurant



Here is the link to the survey: Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management.

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Speech Accessibility Project Seeks Adults with Hearing Loss

The Speech Accessibility Project is recruiting adults with any degree of hearing loss to participate in a research study aimed at improving voice recognition technology for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. The project is supported by Amazon, Apple, Google, Meta and Microsoft.

Participants will record speech samples and answer questions online at their own pace, using a personal computer or tablet. The study is estimated to take about seven hours in total and can be completed over up to three months. No in-person attendance is required. Compensation is available for participation. Real-time captioning and American Sign Language interpretation are provided and do not need to be requested in advance.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older. No specific hearing device is required to take part. Enrollment is open through December 2027.

To learn more about participating, scan the QR code in the graphic at right or email speechaccessibility@beckman.illinois.edu.



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Tech Focus: Hearing Implants and MRIs

More people are getting cochlear implants (CIs), and CIs aren't the only implants designed to improve hearing. Bone anchored hearing aids (BAHAs) are not cochlear implants, but they are implanted devices rather than regular hearing aids.

- **CIs** provide hearing when hair cells in the cochlea can't provide enough hearing to be useful by directly electrically stimulating the nerve cells at the base of inner hair cells.

- **BAHAs** are used with conductive losses, when there are enough working inner hair cells, but the normal conductive path through the eardrum and ossicles can't stimulate the inner hair cells in the cochlea enough to provide useful hearing. BAHAs are also used for single-sided deafness (SSD) to provide hearing to a good ear from the bad ear even when there are no hair cells in the deaf ear. BAHAs use physical vibrations of the mastoid bone to stimulate existing hair cells, which in turn stimulates the nerve cells at their base.

Both implant types normally use an internal magnet to attach the external processor to the side of your head, so it can transmit the necessary signals to stimulate hearing. But one of the most asked questions is, "If I get an implant, can I still have an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)?" The answer is widely misunderstood even by people who have had implants. Here are the facts:

- Only the internal device matters. Whether you can get an MRI has NOTHING to do with the external processor.
- All internal devices that are CURRENTLY being implanted can have an MRI with only minor concerns addressed.
    - Some internal models may require lower power to be used by the MRI.
    - The area very close to the internal device will not be clear in the image. The workaround may be to use a CT scan, or if necessary, the internal magnet can be removed to reduce the size of the affected image area.
- Earlier devices that aren't MRI safe may allow temporary magnet removal, which eliminates the magnet problem, but still leaves some image distortion very near the internal device. Some manufacturers can supply a tight headwrap that can be used to hold the internal device in place during the MRI. The tight headwrap option has worked for some but has led some patients to terminate the MRI early.
- The earliest implanted internal devices before magnet removable was possible cannot be subjected to an MRI but may be able to rely on lower detailed imaging options like CT scans for some needs.
- Each brand has a different history, defining when their models could not have an MRI, when their models became conditionally safe with magnet removal or a headwrap, when their models became MRI safe with only minor issues. Each patient should know which category their internal device is in.

If you already have a hearing implant that might not be MRI compatible, and might need frequent MRIs, your surgeon can advise you on whether removing and not replacing the internal magnet might be an option. You could use a headband or a non-magnet approach to securing the external device so it can communicate with the internal device. The image quality very near the implant site is still affected, but less so.

So, how do you know if you can have an MRI? If you haven't been implanted yet, it will be MRI compatible. If your internal CI or BAHA device was implanted recently, it may already be MRI compatible. Your audiologist, surgeon or manufacturer can teil you exactly what you need to know.

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How to File a Complaint About Television Closed Captions

Closed captions display the audio portion of a television program as text on the screen, including dialogue and important sounds. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires these closed captions to be:

- **Accurate:** The words displayed in the captions must match what is being said. They must also provide text to represent other sounds important to the context of the scene.
- **Synchronous**: Close captions should appear at the same time as the corresponding words and sounds.
- **Complete**: The entire program must include closed captions.
- **Properly placed:** The captions should not block important visual information on the screen.



Sometimes, captions don't meet these standards. If you experience problems such as missing or inaccurate captions, captions that are out of sync or captions that block important information, you should report the problem to the programming distributor. You may also file a complaint with the FCC.

We know that filing a report may not feel very exciting or important. But in the same way that a pothole won't be fixed until someone reports it, accessibility services can't improve unless problems are documented. It's a small but important step in helping everyone contribute to better results.

Report TV Captioning Issues

- File an accessibility complaint with the FCC: Accessibility Complaint Filing Categories
- Learn more about FCC accessibility rules and resources: fcc.gov/accessibility

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