U-Md. Sued for Not Providing Captioning at Sporting Events

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Post 04 October 2013 By Helen Okobokekeimei

University of Maryland was sued for not providing captioning in their sport games

The National Association of the Deaf filed a lawsuit against the University of Maryland for not providing open captioning announcements during the school's on-campus sports games.

Two deaf sports patrons and Terrapins fans attended the university's sporting events and were upset they could not understand what was said during the games, making them feel excluded from the experience.

The NAD stated that the university violated Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities at the local and state levels.

Chief Executive Officer of the NAD, Howard A. Rosenblum, is pushing for the public institution to provide equal access to people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

"We would like for Maryland, and really all collegiate and professional sports teams, to realize that they have deaf and hard of hearing fans, and to realize that they need to ensure that all of their fans can access their games, not just some of them," said Rosenblum.

The University of Maryland athletic department issued the following statement.

"The University of Maryland is committed to providing an outstanding fan experience for all and we certainly do not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. We offer accommodations that we believe are in compliance with the law, including providing closed captioning of all game announcement through a special website accessible by any smart phone or tablet."

However, the website that the athletic department is referring to provides closed captioning, opposed to open captioning which are always in view on the screen.

Gary Muggleton, a junior family science major, has mixed feelings about the issue, but agrees with the NAD filing a lawsuit.

"I feel that I am excluded without captions," he said. "How can I understand what is going on with communication happening during the game when I am there?"

Muggleton said he understands it will take time for Maryland to implement these changes if the lawsuit is successful. He also believes the NAD is not being assertive enough in reaching its goal and mentions a similar suit at FedEx Field – home of the Washington Redskins – in 2006 for not putting captions on the big screen.

“I went just last season to a pre-season game and there was nothing on the Jumbotron,” he said. “So I asked the assistant, ‘Is there any way to get captions on the Jumbotron?’ She said, ‘Fine, I’ll add them,’ but nothing happened.”

He is not confident the NAD will get the results to achieve their objective.

There is no further update on the lawsuit at this time.