



March 7, 2008

Dear Film Festival Programmers,

I am the Director of Public Relations for the Greater Los Angeles Agency of Deafness, Inc. (GLAD). GLAD's mission is to ensure equal access of the deaf and hard of hearing community to the same opportunities afforded their hearing counterparts. The organization's general purposes and powers are directed around the promotion of the social, recreational, cultural, educational, and vocational well-being of its deaf and hard of hearing constituents.

GLAD enthusiastically supports *Universal Signs* and requests its inclusion in your film festival. In Los Angeles, a city where filmmaking and movies are an essential part of daily life, there is a group of people who do not have regular access to the movies, one of the most beloved American pastimes. The deaf and hard of hearing population needs your support.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing persons. However, through a loophole in the law, by claiming unjust financial hardship, the film industry is exempt from the Americans with Disabilities Act. The industries of film production and film distribution are not required to provide open or closed captioning for deaf and hard of hearing audiences. Because of this, the majority of deaf and hard of hearing people across the country are still unable to go to their neighborhood movie theater and see a movie with captions.

Universal Signs starring Deaf actor, Anthony Natale is the first time, since Marlee Matlin won the Best Actress Oscar for *Children of a Lesser God* in 1980, that a deaf actor led a dramatic film. Deaf and hard of hearing actors are virtually forgotten in mainstream cinema, often appearing as sub-characters and sub-sub-characters – the friendly deaf brother or misunderstood deaf father. Anthony Natale takes on a multi-dimensional, "every man" in the character of Andrew. His performance and the performance of deaf actors Troy Kotsur, Deanne Bray, and Robert DeMayo should be recognized for their amazing achievement and contribution to movies. Not to mention the outstanding achievement of hearing actress, Sabrina Lloyd, who studied tirelessly for three months in private and group sign language classes to learn not only her lines in sign language, but also all of the deaf actors' lines in order to converse fluently. Actress Lupe Ontiveros, a dear friend of GLAD, is also featured in this wonderful film. The actors' dedication to the film, both deaf and hearing, is incredible.

As a representative of GLAD, I had the pleasure to visit set the while the film was in production for a week in Los Angeles. I greatly enjoyed experiencing this unique set with deaf and hearing cast and crew members along with interpreters working together. I was delighted with everyone's sheer joy for the project.

Your inclusion of *Universal Signs*, a film performed in sign language with captions, in your festival is a statement that you support the rights of this minority group and you are willing to take a stand in support of the deaf and hard of hearing community!

GLADly,

Rachel Braver
Director of Public Relations