

Open captioning for Maui's deaf is now showing in local theaters

On-screen information is more detailed than traditional subtitles, easier to use than external devices

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Deaf or hearing impaired moviegoers on Maui will no longer have to rely on external devices to catch witty one-liners and tricky plot twists - the words now will be right up on the big screen.

Following a new state law that requires movie theaters to provide open captioning for films, Maui Deaf Friends and Aloha Independent Living Hawaii are hosting a series of film screenings, beginning Monday with "Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice" at the Maui Mall Megaplex Cinema in Kahului.

"This is to celebrate the new accessibility law," said Brian Hauser, advocacy coordinator for Aloha Independent Living. "The point is to have people who are deaf go to whatever movies they want."

Last May, Gov. David Ige signed a law originally introduced by state representatives who included Rep. James Tokioka, whose son is deaf. The law, effective from 2016 to 2018, requires theaters operating more than two locations in the state to provide open movie captioning for at least two showings a week. Theaters must also provide visually impaired moviegoers with audio description services upon request for any film that includes this feature.

"In the Legislature's small capacity, we wanted, together, to do what we could to better support the deaf community throughout Hawaii," said Maui Rep. Justin Woodson, who also is involved in legislation to remove the 2018 sunset date. "This is one small way we could do that."

Open captioning includes slightly more detail than subtitles, with nonverbal phrases such as "thunder" or "car honking." Unlike closed captioning, which can be turned on and off using a decoder found in most TVs, open captioning cannot be removed from the screen.

External captioning technology already was available at local theaters, including glasses that project captions on the wearer's lens. However, these types of devices forced

viewers to choose between the on-screen action and the words, said Beth King, a teacher for the deaf at Maui High School.

"You're either focusing an inch from your head or focusing far away on the screen," she explained.

King, who is secretary for Maui Deaf Friends, said open captioning also is helpful to English language learners or elderly viewers who may have a hard time hearing.

Maui Mall Megaplex features open caption films on Monday evenings and Saturday mornings. The theater also has eight eyeglass devices for those who are deaf or hearing impaired and eight narration headsets for those who are blind or visually impaired. The Kaahumanu 6 Consolidated Theaters at the Queen Ka'ahumanu Center in Kahului has a different open captioning film showing every day, with two devices per theater for visually impaired moviegoers and four total devices for hearing impaired people.

Hawaii is the first state to require theaters to offer movies with open captioning, according to Maui Deaf Friends and Aloha Independent Living Hawaii.

Shortly after the law went into effect in January, some of Oahu's deaf community gathered to watch "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." The positive feedback inspired Maui's deaf community to organize an event of its own, King said.

Monday's showing will take place at 7 p.m. The movie is rated PG-13 and lasts 2 hours and 31 minutes. Tickets cost \$11.60 for adults and \$8.60 for children, and each family will receive one free popcorn. American Sign Language interpreters will be on hand before and after the event.

Hauser said that the next screening will be in partnership with the Department of Education and will include accommodations for visually impaired and hearing impaired moviegoers. The third event will be focused on visually impaired residents. Details and dates are not yet set for the next screenings, since theaters "only win a title a couple of weeks before the actual showing," Hauser explained.

King said the events are "just another way to let the general population know there is a linguistic minority group among us, and they have needs, and this is one of them."

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